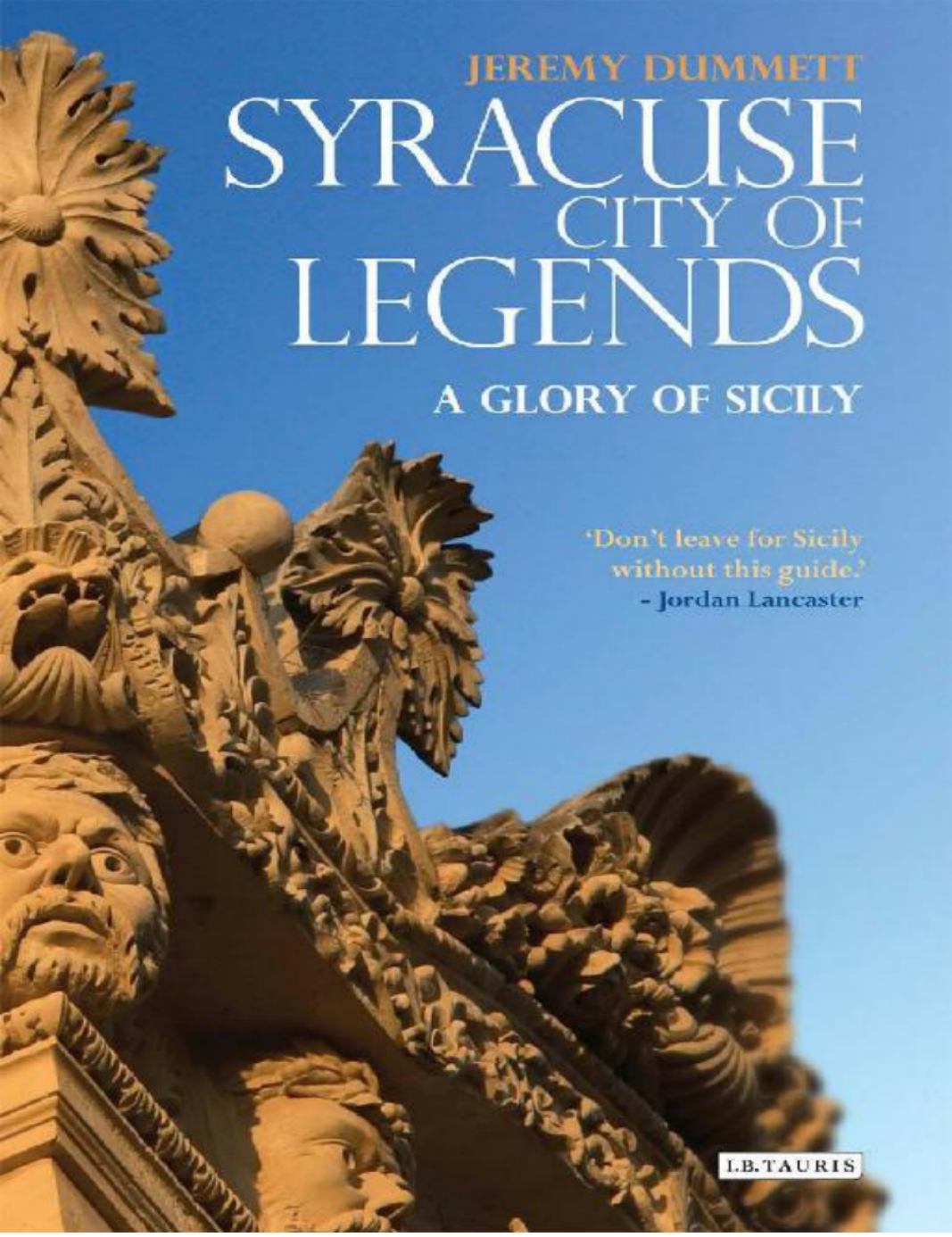
# SYRACUSE
## CITY OF
# LEGENDS

VISIT...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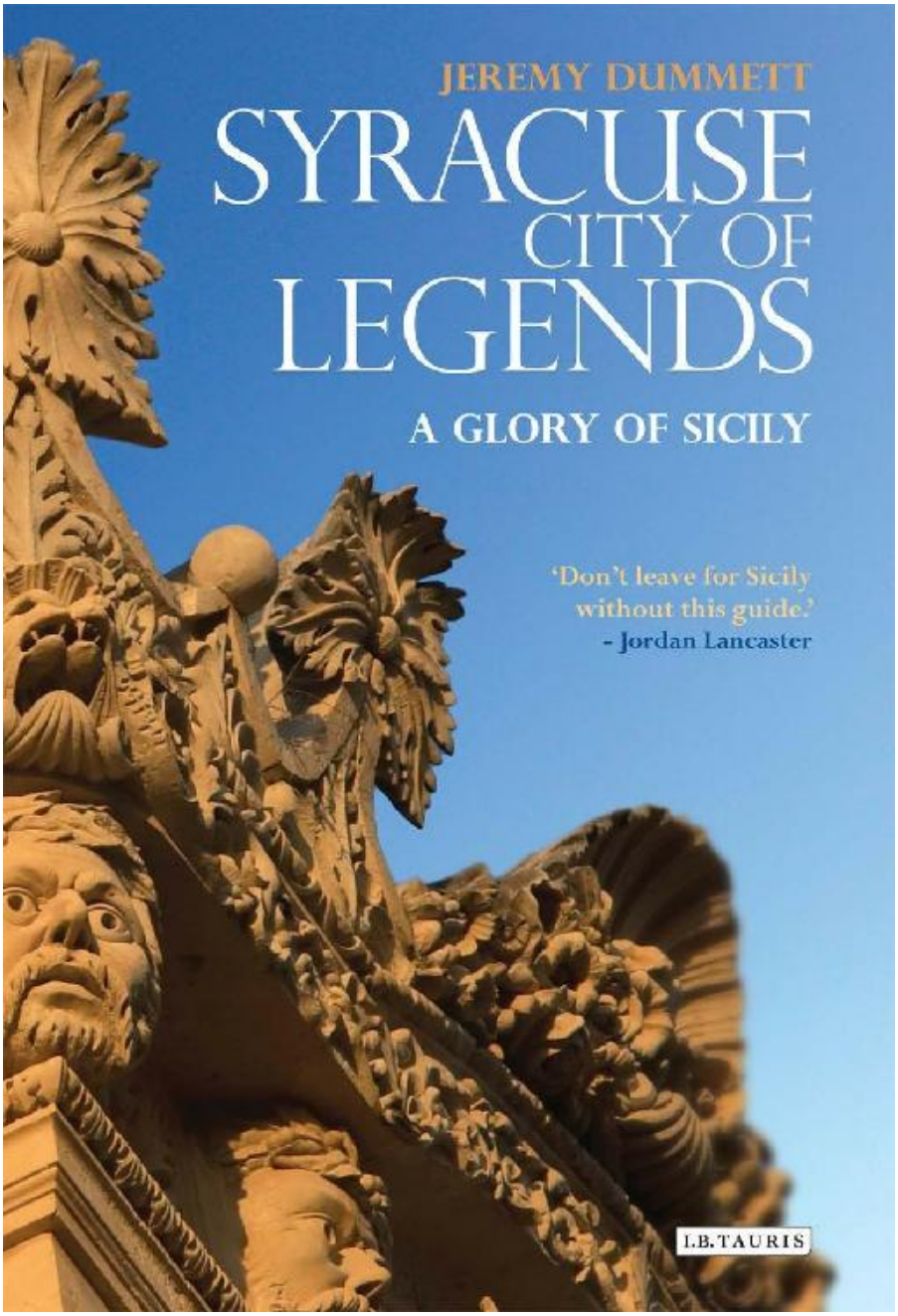
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Jeremy Dummett read history at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became interested in the history and culture of Italy. His professional career took him to Athens and Milan, where he lived and worked for over twelve years. Now retired, he is a frequent visitor to Sicily (www.jeremydummett.com).

**'For newcomers exploring Sicily for the first time, as well as for returning visitors, Jeremy Dummett's *Syracuse, City of Legends* is a welcome travelling companion whose enthusiasm is catching. Dummett offers a rich trove of information about its deep past, which he helpfully links to the places that can be visited today, including the more intimate places off the beaten path.'**

Judith Harris, author of *Pompeii Awakened*

'At last Syracuse is receiving the attention it deserves. Congratulations to Jeremy Dummett for his celebration of this Sicilian gem. Don't leave for Sicily without this guide.'

Jordan Lancaster, author of *In the Shadow of Vesuvius:*

*A Cultural History of Naples*

# SYRACUSE
## CITY OF
# LEGENDS
## A GLORY OF SICILY

Jeremy Dummett

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

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Penguin Books Ltd

Santuario della Madonna delle Lacrime, Siracusa

Sellerio Editore

UNESCO, World Heritage Centre

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Published in 2010 by I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd

6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU

175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

www.ibtauris.com

Distributed in the United States and Canada Exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan

175 Fifth Avenue,

New York NY 10010

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ISBN: 978 1 84885 322 5

eISBN: 978 0 85773 061 9

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Typeset in Perpetua by MPS Limited, A Macmillan Company

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# Preface

The idea for this book goes back to February 2005 when we were staying in Ortygia, in an apartment overlooking the Great Harbour. Exploring the city we could see that it was a fascinating place. I became interested in the history and started to do some research and discovered a mass of literature referring to Syracuse, but no recent book on her history and monuments. A project began to take shape and this book is the result, which is intended both for the general reader interested in the Mediterranean and for the visitor looking for specific guidance on the city.

The book is in two parts. Part I tells the story of Syracuse concentrating upon ancient times when the city was at the peak of her power. There is an outline chapter bringing the story up to 1945 and a final chapter on the modern city. It is told in narrative form, making full use of contemporary accounts. The many colourful legends which accompany the story, some well known like the sword of Damocles, make the task of disentangling fact from fiction more difficult but are full of interest in their own right. A prologue sets the scene and gives the views of travellers to Syracuse in the past.

Part II describes the monuments and works of art to be seen today. They come from different eras and for the sake of clarity are presented in their historical context, together with maps showing their locations. Because of this division into historical eras, certain sites such as the Cathedral and the Archaeological Museum appear in more than one chapter.

The story in Part I highlights the main, well-documented events and outstanding characters. The full history, as told by the nineteenth-century historians, is too complex and too full of twists and turns to be included in a book of this kind. Likewise, in a place so filled with relics of the past as to be almost impossible to catalogue, not every monument gets a mention. In both cases, what appears in the book is a personal selection I have made on the basis of what seemed most interesting and relevant.

The sources, on which this book is based, appear in the ‘Notes’ for each chapter and in a full list in the bibliography. For the story, original sources have been used wherever possible. For the monuments, the works of archaeologists and other specialists have been consulted. The conclusions of my own visits are also included.

Photos, illustrations and maps play an integral part in the book to illustrate both the story and the monuments. To help explain the material, a chronological table and a glossary have been added.

A note on the use of proper names: Italian names have been preferred throughout, for the sake of consistency and clarity. Thus, the point in the harbour opposite Ortygia is called Plemmirio, which the visitor will find on the map, rather than by its classical name. Similarly, the city's patron saint is referred to as Santa Lucia, rather than the anglicised St Lucy. The name of the city and the spelling of Ortygia with a 'y' both follow the English usage that appears in the sources.

To some extent the monuments and works of art present a moving target in terms of where they can be found and when they are open, as Syracuse is going through a period of rapid change. At the time of writing, the Maniace Castle has just reopened after extensive renovations to the entrance area; Caravaggio's painting has been moved temporarily to the church of Santa Lucia alla Badia in Piazza Duomo, while the Basilica is being restored; and a new sign has appeared outside the site known as the Roman Gymnasium, now calling it the *Piccolo Teatro Romano* (Small Roman Theatre). One hears that in future the coin collection, currently to be seen in Piazza Duomo, will be moved to the Archaeological Museum. Initiative is required to track down the things to see, and information is scarce. This is why it can be a good idea, during a stay in the city, to hire the services of a guide for a whole or a half day. Hotels and letting agencies can advise on guides who should be booked well in advance.

Although Sicily is well known for her cities, history and travel books tend to cover the whole island; this book is unusual in concentrating upon one place, with the advantage of presenting a continuous story in depth. If it can contribute to the appreciation and enjoyment of Syracuse and her province, it will have achieved its aim.

# Acknowledgements

A number of people have helped in producing this book. I am particularly grateful to Liz Friend-Smith and her colleagues at I.B. Tauris for publishing it and for their suggestions on structure. Early in the project I was lucky to get some sound professional advice, pointing me in the right direction, for which I would like to thank Jeremy Mynott and Roger Crowley. For the research, the British Library proved to be an amazing resource with highly efficient staff.

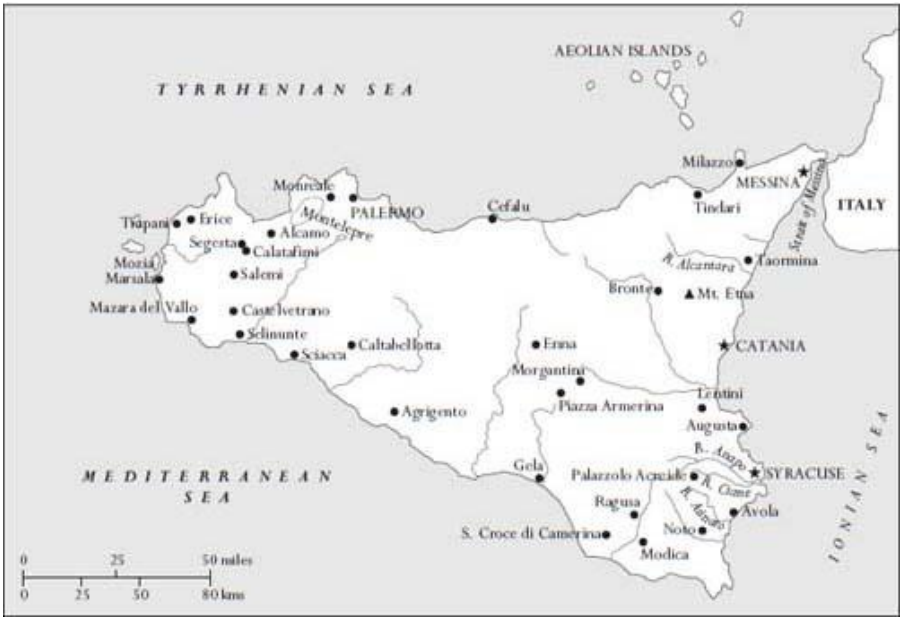
During our visits to Syracuse we were well looked after by Lilla Occhipinti and Massimo Burgio, who provided us with convenient and comfortable apartments in which to stay. Getting to know the monuments was greatly helped by the presence of a guide, and we spent many happy and informative hours exploring the sites in the company of Eva Greco and Carmine Corso. They added greatly to our knowledge of the city. Other vital sources of information included the staff working at the sites, and the local bookshops and newspapers.

Family connections proved most useful, and I would like to thank the following for their contributions: Caroline Knight for her advice on obtaining illustrations; Georgina Kirk and Iain Moran for developing my website; Mark Dummett for his comments on early chapters; Cassie for sharing her recent experience of publishing a book; Alex and Henry for photography and Hermione for her help throughout the project.

*To Hermione*

The Mediterranean Sea

Ancient Sicily




Modern Sicily

# Prologue

Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean, has always been a world of its own. Strategically placed between Italy and North Africa and between east and west, the island became a frontier zone for warring nations. Sicily's past is characterised by violent conquest and exploitation by foreign powers, interspersed with periods of prosperity and cultural brilliance. According to the Sicilian writer Andrea Camilleri, Sicily has suffered 13 foreign dominations from which she has taken both the best and the worst. This sequence of different cultures has made Sicily a fascinating place, quite unlike any other.[1]

Syracuse was founded by Greeks in the eighth century BC on the east coast of Sicily, in a place of outstanding natural beauty, facing the Ionian Sea. The site had unique advantages, and no city has ever had a better natural position in which to develop as a maritime and commercial power. The dominant features were two magnificent harbours bounded by a rocky promontory, originally an island, and a ridge of hills beyond. The Great Harbour provided safe anchorage for a whole fleet of ships. The Little Harbour became a shipyard with protected access. The promontory became a fortified citadel, known as Ortygia, while the ridge of hills, the Epipoli, gave protection from the interior of Sicily. In this position Syracuse became one of the best defended cities in the Mediterranean.

Few cities were so praised in antiquity for the beauty of their buildings and their works of art; few cities have experienced such extremes of fortune; few cities have such an illustrious cast of characters and can say that, at their peak, they were one of the greatest cities in the world.

The usual way to approach Syracuse these days is by road from Catania. Whether arriving by air at Fontanarossa, Catania's airport, or by motorway, the dominating feature of the landscape as one approaches Catania is Mount Etna. Snow-capped for much of the year and often emitting a plume of smoke, it fills the background with its massive shape. Etna is the greatest volcano in Europe and, at 3,300 metres high, is nearly three times the height of Vesuvius. It is still active and eruptions have caused much damage over the years, destroying villages and even threatening Catania in recent memory. While occasionally destructive, it is not normally considered dangerous and people live on its slopes, working the land. To the south of Etna and around Catania the land is under intense

cultivation, its dark, lava-enriched soil full of vineyards, orange and lemon groves and vegetable gardens.

From Catania the road to Syracuse runs down the wide coastal plain lined with eucalyptus trees, before winding up a hill to reach the plain again near the Bay of Augusta. Here an industrial plant comes into view down by the coast. This is an oil refinery and chemical works that dominate the bay with storage tanks and ugly metal towers, built in the 1950s when oil was discovered off the Sicilian coast. In the middle of the pylons lie the ruins of Megara Hyblaea, an ancient Greek city. It is one of four similar plants built in beautiful parts of the coastline around the island.

A long, narrow road leads into Syracuse past rich farmland and, to the left, the rocky hillside that lies above the city. Further on, a glimpse can be caught of Ortygia and the harbour. Then come the outskirts of the city, followed by the railway and bus stations. From here down to the harbour lies the district built in the nineteenth century containing large blocks of town houses. Down the centre of this district runs Corso Umberto, a wide avenue of two and three storey buildings, with shops below and apartments above, lined with mature oleander trees. The Corso leads to the Umbertino Bridge that crosses into Ortygia, the city's historic centre. The bridge spans inland waterways that link the two harbours, with a row of low, colourful buildings along the front and fishing boats moored down the sides. To the right opens up the expanse of the Great Harbour, while ahead lies Piazza Pancali, a large square with tall palm trees, that leads on one side to the outdoor market and on the other to the remains of the Temple of Apollo. Past the temple a modern shopping street leads up the hill into the centre of Ortygia which, once off the main route, is full of alleyways and little squares, with buildings dating from many different eras, representing layer upon layer of history. It is a place full of surprises, Baroque balconies, ornate doorways, small churches, courtyards with outside staircases and sudden, spectacular views of the sea.

At the highest point of Ortygia lies Piazza Duomo, the cathedral square, one of the finest in Sicily. The cathedral itself epitomises the story of Syracuse, for it was built over an ancient Greek temple, the columns of which form part of its structure, and it has been a place of worship for nearly 2,500 years. Two statues in its rich, Baroque facade recall the early Christian era, those of San Marciano, bishop of Syracuse and Santa Lucia, the city's patron saint.

The continuing appeal of Santa Lucia was demonstrated by an event that took place on 15 December 2004. A large crowd had gathered by the harbour to welcome home the body of the saint that had been absent from Syracuse for 965 years. It was an emotional homecoming. Lucia was a young girl when she was martyred for her Christian faith during the persecutions of Diocletian in 304. Her body remained in Syracuse until 1039 when it was taken first to Byzantium and later to Venice, where it lies in the Church of S. Geremia. The church in Venice had given permission for the body to be returned for one week to mark 1,700 years from her death.

After her death, the fame of Lucia spread rapidly from Sicily and she gained devotees first in Rome, then throughout Italy, particularly in Naples where the popular song *Santa Lucia* comes from, and later in Scandinavia. Her feast day is celebrated annually on 13 December, the anniversary of her death. On this day in Syracuse the silver statue of the saint kept in the cathedral is carried through the city to the Basilica of Santa Lucia, the church built on the place where she died, to cries of: 'She is Syracusan!' Above the altar in the basilica hangs Caravaggio's vast canvas, *The Burial of Santa Lucia*, one of his last masterpieces, painted during his stay in Syracuse in 1608.

The name Lucia means light, and according to the legend, her eyes were torn out during her martyrdom and later healed by God, which explains why she is often pictured holding two eyes on a dish and why she became the patron saint of the blind. Dante recognised Lucia's importance when he included her in the *Inferno*, Canto II, as one of three images of Divine Grace, the other two being that of Virgin Mary and Beatrice.

Eva Greco, a tour guide, remembers her return as follows:

When Santa Lucia came back I was at the harbour like all Syracusans, all of us, not only for the big event but for the feeling of loving Santa Lucia so much, and to welcome her in the best and warmest way. I am sure that everybody felt she was a young girl, kidnapped long ago, finally coming home after a lot of suffering, but now safe! What surprised me so much was the absolute silence of thousands of people, who remained breathless when she touched the ground of the Marina. Can you imagine that I had to swallow more than one teardrop, notwithstanding my agnostic heart? I think that this strange emotion was shared by every one of us.[2]

At the welcoming ceremony the saint appeared with her head resting on a red cushion, a silver mask over her face and her body

clothed in a red garment with a golden fringe, dotted with pearls. There followed a week of pilgrimage and intense activity in Syracuse, with thousands of people coming to honour the saint, the most important symbol of the city.

When the week was up, a farewell service was held in the basilica, to a packed congregation. The crowd outside in the piazza followed the service on a giant screen, with many tears and signs of the cross, and afterwards watched the body as it was placed in a red helicopter of the fire service. Waving handkerchiefs and scarves, the crowd stood quietly with upturned faces while the helicopter made a last turn over the city and then disappeared towards Catania and the flight back to Venice.

Modern Syracuse is a medium-sized city with a population of around 125,000, the fourth largest in Sicily, and is both a cultural and a commercial centre. Her role as a cultural centre is assured by the outstanding attractions of the archaeological sites, ancient buildings and works of art. What Syracuse offers is most suitable for visitors with the time to stay and explore. Based in the city, they can take in the sites and museums at leisure and then enjoy an evening wandering around Ortygia and the waterfront. It is a good place for walking, for searching out the smaller sites, for boat trips and excursions into the province, the whole experience enhanced by the friendliness of the people.

Commercially life is more difficult, for like other Sicilian cities, Syracuse suffers from an under-developed economy and years of under-investment in infrastructure, so that she is still searching for a sound economic base. Employment in the oil and chemical industries continues to decline, while tourism which has grown substantially over the last ten years has not yet closed the gap. A good sign for the future is that the city is now attracting substantial investment, both public and private, and seems to be entering a period of rapid development.

Syracuse is also head of a province, covering very diverse territory, which occupies the south-eastern corner of Sicily. To the north lies the industrial zone around the Bay of Augusta, which contains several sites of historical interest, and further on towards Catania, the town of Lentini, with its ancient Greek site. To the south, the coastal strip runs down to the southern-most point of the island past the sandy beaches of Arenella and Fontane Bianche and the nature reserve of Vendicari, with its marsh birds and flamingos. To the west, inland over rocky

hillsides, lie several towns in the foothills of the Hyblaean Mountains, engaged in agriculture. One of these is Palazzolo Acreide, an attractive town with interesting churches and an ancient Greek site, for this was Akrai, one of the first outposts of ancient Syracuse. These hillsides also contain Pantalica, the most important archaeological site in the province outside Syracuse. Located in rugged country around deep river valleys, it consists of a necropolis with thousands of tombs cut into the rock like windows, dating from pre-historic times.

Noto is the most famous of the provincial towns and lies south of Syracuse on the continuation of the coast road. Built from scratch after the earthquake of 1693 had destroyed the old town, it is one of the masterpieces of Sicilian Baroque. Entering through an arched gateway, a long straight road cuts through the middle of the town lined with an array of attractive churches, palaces and municipal buildings. Halfway down and dominating the centre is the cathedral, built in golden sandstone. It is approached by a broad series of steps leading up to a high, elaborate facade supported by columns and crowned with statues. The town is decorated with fountains, gardens, stairways and the characteristic balconies, their metal balustrades supported by exotic, sculptured figures. The road from Noto leads on to the province of Ragusa and the two spectacular Baroque hilltowns of Modica and Ragusa.

The province is famous for its food and wine, produce such as almonds and red wine from Avola, dessert wine from Noto, honey from the Hyblaean Mountains, tomatoes from Pachino, blood oranges from Lentini and olive oil from around Syracuse. Fish are in good supply from the coastal waters. In the days of the ancient Greeks, Sicily was famous for its cuisine, when to have a Sicilian chef was like having a French one in modern times, and the Syracusan table was renowned for gourmet eating. The variety and quality of food still available in Syracuse are on display at the outdoor market in Ortygia. Stalls are piled high with fruit and vegetables in brilliant colours, the sunlight diffused by awnings that cover melons, peaches, tomatoes, zucchini, red and yellow peppers, oranges and lemons, slices of red watermelon and bunches of herbs. Specialist stalls display sacks of sun-dried tomatoes, honey, barrels of olives, bottles of olive oil and the local cheeses, *ricotta, caciocavallo* and *pecorino fresco.* The fish stalls are the most dramatic, with their tuna and swordfish being sliced up, surrounded by a great variety of smaller species including sea bass, large prawns, octopus, *calamari*, sardines and the fish in

season, such as *arriciola* or *lampuca.*

Sicilian food comes with the strong flavours of the southern Mediterranean and is based upon a unique blend of influences from the island's long history. The ancient Greeks introduced the Mediterranean diet and the Arabs, who later ruled Sicily, added a new level of sophistication. They brought rice and pasta, oranges and lemons, aubergines and cucumbers, as well as cane sugar, used for making the very sweet cakes and desserts. The modern version of the Syracusan table, with the *antipasti* invitingly laid out, can be found in the small, family-run *ristoranti* around Ortygia and the harbours.

***

Greek Syracuse as a wealthy centre of power and the arts became a legend, created by writers in ancient times, which has been attracting people ever since. One of the first cultural tourists was Cicero, who when *quaestor* in Sicily in 75 BC, came to Syracuse to explore the ancient city. In Rome, Emperor Augustus kept his collection of Greek sculptures in a private apartment that he called his *Syracuse.* Sicily became a fashionable place for wealthy Romans to take their holidays, which included a visit to Syracuse and a climb up Mount Etna.

When Shakespeare wrote *A Comedy of Errors*, he drew upon the legendary past of the city to describe the character Aegeon as a merchant of Syracuse. A modern, musical version of the play is performed under the name *The Boys from Syracuse.*

The first comprehensive reconstruction of Greek Syracuse was published in 1613 by the archaeologist Vincenzo Mirabella, described as a *Cavaliere Siracusano.* It is an astonishing work, presented in a series of large maps supported by a mass of detailed notes on all aspects of the ancient city. It includes Mirabella's own theories, for example, on the location of the castle of the tyrant Dionysius I, which he maintained was on the site of the Marieth Castle by the Little Harbour, below which were ancient tunnels connecting it to Ortygia. The work was based on Mirabella's own research and the texts of the ancient writers. While it is now considered to be partly a work of imagination, it remains the most ambitious reconstruction to date.

International travellers discovered Sicily in the eighteenth century, extending their tours from the traditional round of Florence, Rome and Naples. The first visitors were men with a classical education attracted by the ancient ruins, who published journals filled with quotations in Greek and Latin, which they were confident their readers would understand. For these travellers the real Syracuse was

the ancient Greek city and for whom the modern buildings, including the Baroque, just got in the way.

Patrick Brydone's visit in 1773 was a landmark, for the account of his adventures in Sicily was widely read in Europe and encouraged others to follow. Brydone and his companions rode around the island on horseback, rifles at the ready to deal with brigands. Finding somewhere to stay was often a problem, and in Modica they were offered a room filled with straw, from which some pigs had just been removed. Brydone was not impressed by Syracuse, which he found dilapidated and semi-abandoned.

George Russell was an enthusiastic visitor to Syracuse in 1815. Having consulted the ancient historians on the sea voyage from Rome, he went around all the major sites and found them fascinating. He used a brace of pistols to test the acoustic properties of the cave known as the Ear of Dionysius, which produced a noise like a long peal of thunder. Like many visitors from northern Europe he fell for the Mediterranean atmosphere and summarised his stay in the city as follows:

In a word, the peculiar softness of the climate, the delicious flavour of the wines, and the irresistible fascination of lovely woman, all united, inspire the highest pleasure and delight.[3]

Later in the nineteenth century, renewed public interest in the ancient world encouraged a leap forward in the rediscovery of ancient Sicily. In 1883, an important work on the topography of ancient Syracuse was published by the Director of Antiquities Cavallari. He was succeeded in 1886 by Paolo Orsi, who was to spend 45 years in Syracuse and become the pioneer of archaeology in eastern Sicily. He went on to excavate new sites in Syracuse and the province, catalogue remains, establish new research methods and publish numerous studies. His most important excavations included pre-historic sites at Thapsos and Stentinello; the Greek city of Megara Hyblaea; and in Syracuse, the Greek theatre, the catacombs and the Roman amphitheatre. Orsi's work set the direction for archaeology in Syracuse for many years to come, and when the modern archaeological museum was opened in 1988, it was given his name.

In the same period scholars were attracted to Syracuse to carry out their research. One of these was Edward Freeman, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, who established himself in Ortygia for three months to work on his history of Sicily. He became engrossed in the topography of Syracuse, the characters of the tyrants and in the

texts of the ancient writers, claiming that one of his great pleasures was to read Thucydides beside the Great Harbour. He explored the ancient sites around Sicily, approaching the island of Motya, the Carthaginian base off the western coast, by sailing boat. His *History of Sicily*, covering the Greek era in four volumes, rapidly became the standard work on the subject when it was published. Freeman himself died in 1892 before his *History* was complete.

Arthur Evans, the archaeologist, who later became famous for discovering the Palace of Knossos and other remains of the Minoan civilisation in Crete, came in 1888. His early interest was coinage, and at the time of his visit he was keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He knew Freeman from Oxford and was married to his daughter, Margaret. Evans was excited to hear of a hoard of 80 silver coins found by a man tilling his land on the slopes of Mount Etna. The hoard had been hidden in a pot beneath a layer of lava and contained no less than 65 silver *decadrachms* of Syracuse, large, beautifully designed coins, some signed by the engraver. Following his research he published a book on the subject, *Syracusan Medallions*, in 1892. After Freeman died the same year, Evans completed the fourth volume of Freeman's *History*, which was published in 1894.

Guy de Maupassant, in Sicily in 1885 and staying at the Grand Hotel des Palmes in Palermo, was intrigued to hear that Wagner had completed the score for *Parsifal* three years earlier while living in the hotel. After a tour of the island, Maupassant arrived at Syracuse before embarking for Africa. Here he stayed on the front in Ortygia from where he could watch the ships in the harbour. He described the city as follows:

It is in this unusual and charming town that one must end a visit to Sicily. She is as famous as the bigger cities; her tyrants had reigns as famous as Nero's; her wine is praised by poets; she has, along the shores of the gulf over which she looks out, a little stream, the Anapo, where papyrus grows, the secret guardian of thought; and her walls encompass one of the most beautiful Venuses in the world.[4]

He was referring to the marble statue of Venus in the museum, the sight of which was the highlight of his visit.

Another English visitor was Douglas Sladen, a prolific travel writer who loved Sicily and who visited the island on a number of occasions, staying in style at the Villa Politi in Syracuse. Sladen spent his time reading the ancient texts, exploring the sites around the island and enjoying life in Syracuse. He admired the semi-African scenery with

its prickly pears, palm trees, bamboo, lemons, oranges, olives, almonds and vines. The classical Greek remains he considered as interesting as those in Athens, with the advantage of being easily accessible, the best of which were to be found in Syracuse, Selinunte, Segesta and Agrigento. Living comfortably in Syracuse, he was irritated by the number of tourists, mostly English, who arrived from Malta to spend only a few days in the city, seeing all the wrong things. Sladen preferred to take it slowly and explore in depth:

Syracuse is a place where you can spend any space of time. In a single day you can see the latomias (quarries) and the most splendid of the classical remains. In four days you can see pretty well everything superficially, and in a week fairly well; but if you are content to live among beautiful scenery and vegetation, and occupy yourself with excavating in a small way on your own account, amid half-explored ruins, and elucidating topographical problems of ancient classical history, you will find Syracuse a paradise where you can spend a whole winter or a summer.[5]

In the 1920s Edward Hutton, a travel writer on a tour of Sicily, found Syracuse shrunk back to her origins on Ortygia, with the mainland mostly abandoned and the Villa Politi still in a rural setting. Hutton thoroughly enjoyed Syracuse, taking his time to see the sites, which he found impressive, and visiting the main cities on the island.

Of all Sicilian cities I have loved Syracuse the best, not only for its own sake, its so individual beauty, the nobility of its situation, its manifold treasures, its unrivalled past; but also for the interest and delight of its landscape, the charm of its walks, the beauty of the surrounding country.[6]

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The unique character of Syracuse and her role in the history of the Mediterranean was recognised in 2005 by UNESCO when the city was added to the list of World Heritage Sites. Two separate locations were included in the citation, ancient Syracuse and Pantalica, the prehistoric necropolis inland, containing 5,000 tombs dating from the thirteenth to the seventh centuries BC. Ortygia received special mention as the nucleus of the ancient city. According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the World Heritage Convention's Advisory Body for cultural sites, there is no other city which contains monuments of such exceptional value ranging from the ancient Greek period to the Baroque and including the Roman and early Christian eras. The citation went on to say that

the city's cultural heritage was equally important, as ancient Syracuse was directly linked to events, ideas and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

ICOMOS's evaluation summed up as follows:

In terms of ancient remains, the only possible comparison would be with Carthage and Athens. Carthage, of course, was destroyed, and there are few archaeological traces of its Phenico-Punic past. The monumental splendours of Athens are well known. But it has not retained to the same extent as Syracuse the hallmark of the inter-penetration, down the centuries, of the different cultures of the western world.[7]

# PART I

## The Story of Syracuse

## From Greek City State to Modern Times

# CHAPTER 1

## Foundation and the Rule of Gelon and Hiero I

The story of Syracuse begins in the era of ancient Greek myths and legends when famous heroes fought epic battles, strange creatures inhabited the earth and the gods intervened regularly in human affairs. Archaeological evidence from Pantalica, the prehistoric site just inland from Syracuse, shows human activity dating back to the thirteenth century BC, while the site of Syracuse itself was inhabited from the ninth or the tenth century. From the first half of the eighth century the Greeks and the Phoenicians were sailing around the coasts of Sicily on trading missions. Settlers followed the merchant explorers, spurred on by overcrowding and unrest at home, and eager to establish new communities on the island. Sicily was a mysterious place, unknown in the civilised world. In *The Odyssey*, composed around this time, Odysseus describes an island just off the mainland where he and his men make camp before encountering the Cyclops:

Not very far from the harbour on their coast, and not so near either, there lies a luxuriant island, covered with woods, which is the home of innumerable goats . . . Used neither for grazing nor for ploughing, it lies for ever unsown and untilled . . . For it is by no means a poor country, but capable of yielding any crop in due season. Along the shore of the grey sea there are soft water-meadows where the vine would never wither; and there is plenty of land level enough for the plough . . . for the soil below the surface is exceedingly rich. Also it has a safe harbour in which there is no occasion to tie up at all. Finally at the head of the harbour there is a stream of fresh water running out of a cave in a grove of poplar trees.[1]

This seems very like a description of Sicily and the harbour at Syracuse, possibly recounted to Homer by sailors back from their travels, for whom it must have seemed a magical place. Originally known as Trinacria for its triangular shape, Sicily later took its name from the local inhabitants, the Sicels.

Among the legends is that after the fall of Troy a number of Trojans made their way to Sicily to found a new city. One of the most imaginative is the story of Daedalus, the craftsman, inventor and architect of the Labyrinth, who escaped from Crete with his son, Icarus, using wings made with wax. Icarus, ignoring his father's

warning, flew too close to the sun, melted his wings and was drowned, while Daedalus, cooling his wings in the sea as he went, arrived safely in Sicily. Here he was welcomed by King Kokalos of the Sicans, for whom he put his talents to work. Minos, the Cretan king, arrived in due course in Sicily and demanded the surrender of Daedalus, but he was tricked by Kokalos and killed. Daedalus remained in Sicily practising his craftsmanship, making among other things a golden honeycomb dedicated to Aphrodite of Eryx.

Syracuse has her share of these ancient legends, of which there are many different versions, one of the most famous being the origin of the fountain of Arethusa. The early settlers in Ortygia were delighted to find a freshwater spring close to the sea and built a wall around it. The legend concerned the beautiful nymph Arethusa, of Arcadia in Greece, who bathed in the river Alpheus. The river god fell in love with her, and to escape him, the goddess Artemis transformed Arethusa into a freshwater spring and made a tunnel under the sea from Greece to Sicily. Arethusa emerged in Ortygia, and where her spring bubbled up, this became a place sacred to Artemis. Alpheus pursued her down the tunnel to Ortygia where his water joined the spring.

Another famous legend concerns the source of the Ciane River, situated just inland on the far side of the harbour, noted for the papyrus that grows there. Ciane was a nymph and childhood friend of Persephone, the daughter of the goddess Demeter. While wandering in the Sicilian countryside near Enna, Persephone was carried away by Hades, king of the underworld, in his chariot drawn by black horses. They travelled to the shores of the harbour where Hades struck the ground with his trident, opening up the earth and disappearing into the underworld with Persephone. Ciane was so overcome by grief that she died crying, and her tears turned into a spring on the spot where Persephone disappeared. Persephone became the queen of the underworld, where she was forced to spend half the year, becoming associated with the growth of plants and their rebirth each year, as goddess of Spring. The cult of Demeter and Persephone became of great importance to Sicily. Persephone was known as Kore, the maiden; Demeter was the goddess of the earth and of agricultural produce, such as corn, which was vital to the island's prosperity. Sicily became known as Persephone's Island, given to her by Zeus on her marriage to Hades.

These myths were central to the lives of Syracusans, who built

several sanctuaries in honour of Demeter and Persephone/Kore. The Ciane Spring, in the pool at the head of the river, became a sacred place where an annual festival took place. Arethusa became a symbol of Syracuse, and her head and that of Persephone's appeared on the coins of the city.

## The founding of Syracuse

Syracuse was founded in about 733 BC by Corinthians led by Archias. Strabo, the Greek geographer writing around 20 AD, described the event as follows:

Syracuse was founded by Archias, who sailed from Corinth, about the same time that Naxos and Megara were colonised. It is said that Archias went to Delphi at the same time as Myscellus, and when they were consulting the oracle, the god asked them whether they chose wealth or health; now Archias chose wealth and Myscellus health; accordingly the god granted to the former to found Syracuse and to the latter, Croton. And it actually came to pass that the Crotoniates took up their abode in a city that was exceedingly healthy . . . and that Syracuse fell into such exceptional wealth that the name of the Syracusans was spread abroad in a proverb applied to the excessively extravagant – 'the tithe of the Syracusans would not be sufficient for them'.[2]

Archias came from the ruling Heraclid family in Corinth from where he went into voluntary exile after an incident involving the death of a handsome youth whom he had coveted. He left for Sicily with a group of volunteers, landing originally near the mouth of the Anapo River on the Great Harbour. The site appealed to the Corinthians for its outstanding natural advantages – safe harbours, freshwater springs, a strong defensive position and nearby land for cultivation – while the two harbours separated by the island were reminiscent of Corinth's own position on the isthmus connecting the Peloponnese to mainland Greece. Having subdued the native inhabitants, the Sicels, with whom they intermarried and also used as slaves, the Corinthians established themselves on the island, which became known as Ortygia, from *ortyx*, the Greek word for quail. The new settlement was dedicated to Artemis, goddess and twin sister of Apollo, who was also a huntress associated with wild animals and birds. But the city took her name, *Syrakousai*, from the marshland on the edge of the harbour, known as *Syraco*. Led by Archias, the Corinthians set about developing the settlement with the help of Sicel labour and architects from Corinth.

Archias, who became the father of two daughters, was later killed by Telephus, a companion and commander of one of the ships.

The Greek colonisation of Sicily took off in this period with a number of cities being founded by settlers from different parts of Greece. The first was Naxos, on the east coast below Taormina in 734, founded by Thucles of Chalcis in Euboea. Syracuse was the second, in the following year. The Chaldicians went on to found Leontini and Catana, also on the east coast. Megara Hyblaea was established, just north of Syracuse, by men from Megara in mainland Greece. In 688, settlers from Crete and Rhodes founded Gela, on the south coast. Zancle, so-called for its sickle-shaped bay, later to be known as Messana, was settled by a mixed group from Chalcis and Cumae.

The Greek settlers thrived in their new environment, and their cities grew rapidly in size and prosperity. Sicily at the time was a wooded island with navigable rivers and a fertile plain along the east coast enriched by volcanic lava from Mount Etna. These conditions were a welcome change after the difficulty of producing food from the rocky hillsides in mainland Greece. The sea along the coast teemed with all kinds of fish including huge tuna, sword-fish and sea bream. Before long the Greeks had an abundance of high-quality produce for their own consumption and for export: wheat, cheese, salt fish, olive oil, wine, honey, fruit and vegetables. Sicily acted as a magnet to settlers, the America of the ancient world, and like America, the island offered opportunities to acquire land and create wealth. The open environment encouraged ambitious and unscrupulous men to carve out their careers in Sicily, far from the more controlled city states in mainland Greece.

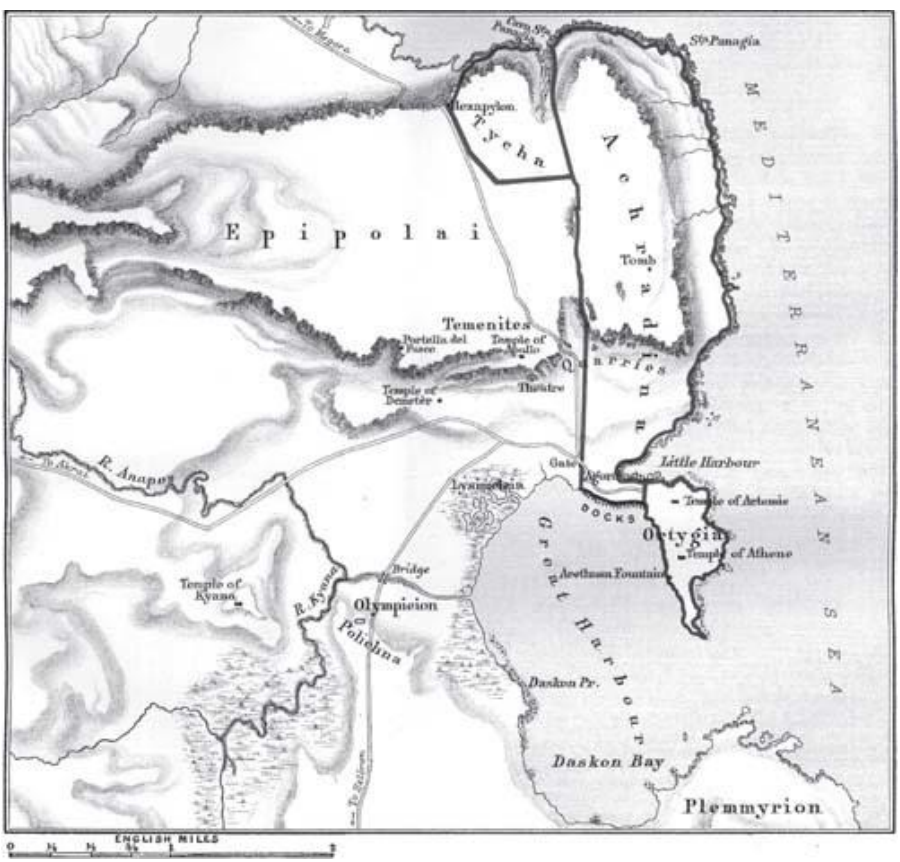
So successful were the early settlements that within a hundred years they founded new cities across Sicily. Syracuse first expanded from her original base in Ortygia onto the mainland, connected by a bridge. To protect her borders, two outposts were established down the coast, at Helorus and Neaiton (Noto). Next she founded three cities in the hinterland of eastern Sicily: Akrai (Palazzolo Acreide) in 664, Kasmenai in 644 and Kamarina on the south coast in 599. Three major cities of the future were also founded in this period: Selinus, on the south coast, from Megara Hyblaea, and Himera, on the north coast, from Zancle and Syracuse, both around 650; and Akragas, which became the only real rival to Syracuse, from Gela, in 580. By the sixth century, thanks to the thriving trade in agricultural produce, these cities had attained a high degree of prosperity.

Each new community had a mother-city in Greece, which had contributed to its foundation and with which there was frequent communication. Corinth, as the mother-city of Syracuse, would play an important part in her future, particularly at times of crisis. These connections were a source of strength to the individual cities but of instability to the island as a whole, for the rivalries between cities in Greece would be acted out by their protégées in Sicily. This would reach a peak during the Peloponnesian War with the split between Ionian and Doric cities, those under Athenian as opposed to Spartan influence. Thucydides deplored the way Greek cities tore each other apart, noting that the danger point was when revenge became more important than self-preservation. These communities, which worshipped the Olympian gods whose cults were brought from the mother-cities, were not so much colonies as new cities in their own right. For the motivation of the settlers was the desire to make a new life in Sicily and they built for the long term, as their temples still demonstrate. It was said that the Sicilian Greeks built as if they would live forever and ate as if they would die tomorrow.[3]

The Greeks in Sicily did not have it all their own way, for the origins of Sicily are multi-ethnic. They found three tribes established on the island, the Sicans in the west, the Elymians in the north-west and the Sicels in the east. The combined population of these tribes was small and was quickly overtaken by the growing Greek communities. In the east, the Greeks rapidly absorbed the Sicel lands along the coast, while the Sicels established themselves inland. In the west, the process was slower as local tribes showed greater resistance. More important for the future were the Phoenicians who had established settlements in Panormus (Palermo) and Soluntum on the north coast, and on Motya, an island off the west coast. The Phoenicians from their bases in North Africa were early explorers and traders and are credited with the first use of pitch to seal their ships, thus enabling longer voyages. In the early days their settlements traded regularly with the Greek cities. But the rise of a new power centre, Carthage, originally a Phoenician settlement in Tunisia, would change all this and provide a new, lethal enemy of the Greek cities in Sicily.

Carthage grew rapidly on the back of the Phoenician civilisation, absorbing its maritime and trading skills as well as its outposts in the Mediterranean. Drawing upon the lands in North Africa, the city had huge reserves of manpower and established the cultivation necessary to feed her growing population. Mercenaries, craftsmen, merchants

and sailors were all attracted to the boom town which developed as a strong commercial and maritime centre, dealing regularly with Spain, Italy and Greece. A prosperous commercial life went hand in hand with a backward religious mentality, and society was overshadowed by a powerful religion from her prehistoric past, which practised frightening forms of worship. Human sacrifice was a regular occurrence, a practice confirmed by archaeological evidence from Motya. Diodorus refers to the custom of leading families sacrificing their babies to the gods Baal and Tanit, 200 at a time. Carthage developed a strong military tradition, building a powerful army and navy and her commanders gained a fearsome reputation, employing bold and unorthodox tactics on the battlefield. This new power was situated only 150 kilometres from the west coast of Sicily, and having absorbed the Phoenician strong-posts of Panormus and Motya, would before long try her strength against the Greeks in the island.



Syracuse in the fifth century BC.

## Gelon: the first great tyrant of Syracuse

Syracuse emerged as the most powerful of the Greek cities with the arrival of Gelon as tyrant in 485. Gelon's family came originally from Rhodes and held a hereditary right to priesthood, linked to the cult of Demeter. He was the eldest of the four sons of Deinomenes, and as a young man had shown himself to be a brave and expert horseman, described by Herodotus as riding like a flame through the ranks of his enemies. He rose to be cavalry commander to Hippocrates, ruler of Gela. By this time the Greek cities in Sicily had grown to the extent that they were challenging each other for territory. Gela, on the south coast, became the dominant power in the region and few cities were able to resist her. Syracuse suffered a major defeat at the hands of Hippocrates and Gelon at Helorus, and at the peace brokered by Corinth, Syracuse was forced to give up Kamarina to Gela. In 488 Gelon proved his horsemanship by winning the chariot race at the Olympic Games in Greece.

The Greek cities had initially followed the example of the motherland in establishing political regimes led by small groups of wealthy aristocratic families and landowners, descendants of the original settlers. But the growth in population and wealth brought increasing unrest and conflict both between different factions of the ruling families and between the common people and the rulers. These power struggles created the environment in which a leader could take control, in the first instance by being appointed *Strategos Autokrator*, General with Supreme Power. This was a legal position, intended to give a commander freedom of action in the field without having to refer to the city for approval for a particular course of action. But it was open to abuse.

Gelon seized power in Gela after Hippocrates was killed in a battle. His big opportunity came when the common people of Syracuse threw out the aristocratic party, the *Gamori*, which in turn appealed to Gelon for help. Recognising the potential of Syracuse and her strong natural position, Gelon assisted the return of the *Gamori* and then rapidly established himself as a tyrant, leaving his brother Hiero in charge of Gela.

Once in Syracuse, Gelon set about consolidating his position by forcefully relocating a large number of citizens from Gela, the entire population of Kamarina and several thousand mercenaries, while forcing a number of Syracusans to leave the city. Megara Hyblaea was also incorporated into the Syracusan territory. New city walls were built to protect Achradina, the first quarter of the city established on

the mainland, and a new *agora* (marketplace) was built on the site of the modern Foro Siracusano. Two new quarters, Tyche and Neapolis, were built outside the city walls to accommodate the increased population, which had risen in total, including the hinterland, to around 200,000.[4] Fortifications were improved, the army was strengthened and the construction of dockyards established the basis of the city's naval power.

New coinage was introduced, in particular a silver *tetradrachm* (four drachma piece) which was produced in large quantities. It carried a design that would become a hallmark of Syracuse: a *quadriga* (four-horse racing chariot) on the obverse (front) and the head of Arethusa, surrounded by four dolphins, on the reverse.

Gelon became the first great tyrant of Syracuse, establishing the Deinomenid Dynasty and proving to be an able ruler and outstanding military commander. His rule, which lasted for seven years, followed by that of his brother Hiero, put Syracuse on the map as a power to be reckoned with in the western Mediterranean. An alliance was made with Theron, tyrant of Akragas, whose daughter Demarete became his wife, and together the cities of Syracuse and Akragas effectively ran Sicily in this period. Indicative of Gelon's stature was the fact that Athens sent ambassadors to ask him for help against the Persians who were preparing to invade Greece, addressing him, according to Herodotus, as follows:

Your power is great; as lord of Sicily you possess no inconsiderable portion of the Greek world; we ask you, therefore, to help us, and to add your strength to ours in our struggle to maintain our country's liberty.[5]

This he refused to do, offering troops only if he had overall command, realising he would need all his resources to fight off the Carthaginians.

In 480 the Carthaginians invaded Sicily with a very large force under the command of Hamilcar. After a rough crossing during which they lost a number of ships, they landed at Panormus and made their way along the north coast towards Himera. The pretext was an appeal from Messana to help retake Himera from Theron, who had recently added it to his possessions. Carthage followed an expansionist policy at the time, supporting Persia in the war against Athens, and saw an opportunity to build her presence in Sicily. Theron's troops met the Carthaginians at Himera, where they suffered an initial defeat. Responding to the crisis, Gelon collected his army, and in a forced march across the island from Syracuse, joined forces with Theron, and

in a day-long battle, together they inflicted a decisive defeat on the Carthaginians. Victory was achieved by a surprise attack from the Syracusan cavalry disguised as allies of Carthage from Selinus, which penetrated the Carthaginian defence and caused chaos at the centre of their army, as Diodorus tells us:

At sunrise the cavalrymen rode up to the naval camp of the Carthaginians, and when the guards admitted them, thinking them to be allies, they at once galloped to where Hamilcar was busied with the sacrifice, slew him, and then set fire to the ships; thereupon the scouts raised the signal and Gelon advanced with his entire army in battle order against the Carthaginian camp.[6]

In Herodotus' version, Hamilcar took his own life by throwing himself onto the blazing pyre where he was making sacrifices to the gods for his victory. The Carthaginian army was destroyed and their ships burned, the surviving troops were taken prisoner and enslaved. The prisoners, who were later put to work in building temples, were so great in number that it looked as if Sicily had captured half of North Africa, and some households in Akragas had as many as 500 prisoners at their disposal. At the same time, according to Herodotus on the same day, the Greeks won their famous naval victory over the Persians at Salamis. This was a great day for Greek civilisation and all Greece celebrated. Foreign invaders had been soundly beaten on two fronts, the immediate threats were removed, and the way now seemed clear for the Greek cities to realise their potential. After these defeats Carthage was hit by crisis, for apart from the losses at Himera, she had been allied to the Persians. Her government fell, the aristocracy took power and rule of the Council of 104, which would be much feared, was established. A lengthy period of retrenchment and reorganisation followed which was to last for 70 years, during which time Carthage left Sicily alone.

For his decisive action Gelon became the hero of the hour, with his status immeasurably enhanced and his praises sung throughout the Greek world. The Carthaginians were cast as barbarians in sharp contrast to the mythical Greek heroes, an image they would never shake off. Gelon granted peace to the Carthaginians in return for a large indemnity to cover the cost of the war. During the peace negotiations, Gelon's wife Demarete used her influence to achieve a just and lasting settlement for which she received a golden crown from the grateful Carthaginians. According to Diodorus, from the treasure paid to Syracuse a medallion was struck, the *Demareteion*, to

commemorate the victory. Legend has it that this was a silver *decadrachm* (ten drachma piece) of outstanding quality, featuring the *quadriga*/Arethusa design. When the peace treaty was completed Gelon appeared, alone and unarmed, before an assembly of the citizens to give an account of his career as ruler of the city. His list of achievements was met with shouts of approval from the Syracusans, who called him their benefactor and king. In this way, Gelon's rule was made constitutional.

Silver *decadrachm*, possibly the *Demareteion*.

The indemnity paid by Carthage was used to pay for a major building programme in Syracuse; to commemorate the victory, Gelon began the construction of his most famous building, the great Doric Temple of Athena in Ortygia. Treasure was sent to Delphi to build a temple near the theatre in honour of Demeter and Kore. When Gelon fell ill, he handed over the administration of the city to his brother Hiero; when Gelon died, almost the whole population turned out for his funeral. A magnificent tomb and monument were built for him on the far side of the harbour, near the Olympeon, which were to be destroyed later by the Carthaginians.

## Hiero I consolidates his brother's work

Hiero, who succeeded Gelon in 478, was a very different character from Gelon. Being suspicious and cruel, shortly after taking control of Syracuse, Hiero began plotting against his younger brother, Polyzalos, of whom he was jealous. While Gelon had left the leadership to Hiero, Polyzalos had been left in charge of the army and Gela, as well as marrying Gelon's widow, Demarete. Polyzalos retired to Gela, where with the support of Theron in Akragas, he succeeded in resisting

Hiero. Peace was concluded in due course.

A relic of these times can be seen in the museum at Delphi in Greece – the Charioteer, one of the most famous bronze statues from antiquity. Originally including four horses and a chariot, the statue was commissioned in Greece to commemorate the victory of Polyzalos in the chariot race in the Pythian Games in Delphi in 474 and was dedicated to Apollo. The inscription on the base of the statue reads:

Polyzalos dedicated me – make him prosper – honoured Apollo.

Hiero went on to establish himself as a strong ruler, consolidating the work of Gelon, and further extending the power and influence of Syracuse. He repopulated the cities of eastern Sicily, Naxos, Leontini and Catana. He renamed Catana as Aetna, bringing 10,000 settlers to the city and surrounding area, and placing his young son, Deinomenes, in charge. Hiero's major achievement was to block the advance of the Etruscans who were becoming a threat to the Greek cities in southern Italy. Responding to a request from the Greek city of Cumae in the Bay of Naples for help against the Etruscans (also known as the Tyrrhenians), Hiero sent a fleet of triremes to Italy. According to Diodorus:

And after the commanders of this fleet had put in at Cumae, joining with the men of that region, they fought a naval battle with the Tyrrhenians, and destroying many of their ships and conquering them in a great sea fight.[7]

The Battle of Cumae saved the Greeks of Campania from dominance by the Etruscans. A bronze helmet celebrating the victory of Hiero at Cumae can be seen in the British Museum. It was found in Olympia in Greece, and the inscription in Greek reads:

Hiero son of Deinomenes and the Syracusans (dedicated) to Zeus Etruscan (spoils) from Cumae.

Hiero enjoyed the company of writers and intellectuals, and being a patron of arts he invited a number of them to his court. The theatre, built in Gelon's time, flourished during his rule. Among those attracted to the city were Pindar, the greatest Greek lyric poet of the day; Aeschylus, the tragic dramatist; Epicarmus, the Sicilian comic dramatist; and the poet Simonides, well known for his stinginess, who discussed finances with Hiero's wife. Like his brothers, Hiero was a skilled rider and won the horse race at the Olympic Games. Pindar was commissioned to celebrate the event in verse, which was performed at Hiero's court in Syracuse, in the presence of Pindar, in

476. In the ode, Hiero is described as:

The King of Syracuse, the soldier horseman

His fame is bright in the great assembly of men.[8]

Legend has it that Aeschylus died in Gela in 456 when an eagle dropped a tortoise onto his bald head, mistaking it for a boulder.

Hiero, who did not possess the charisma or the common touch of Gelon, was not greatly mourned when he died in 467. As Polyzalos had already died, power passed to the fourth brother Thrasybulus, who seems to have been the worst of the brothers. He soon alienated the Syracusans, according to Diodorus:

For being a violent man and murderous by nature, he put to death many citizens unjustly and drove not a few into exile on false charges, confiscating their possessions into the royal treasury.[9]

The Syracusans refused to accept his oppressive rule, and after a struggle, Thrasybulus was sent into exile.

## Democratic interval

After Thrasybulus, prosperity followed in Syracuse and other Greek cities. The assembly met in Syracuse and established a form of democracy based upon that of Athens. An annual Festival of Liberty was introduced to celebrate the end of tyranny, with games and sacrifice of 450 bulls to the gods, with the meat being used for a feast for the people. A huge statue of Zeus the Liberator was commissioned.

Trouble then broke out in Syracuse with the aliens and mercenaries whom Gelon had forcibly brought into the city. Eventually the situation was resolved, with the population returning to their cities of origin, and the settlers put there by the tyrants either expelled or absorbed into the community. A number of the mercenaries moved on to Messana. This freedom brought renewed prosperity to the smaller cities, which had been treated as pawns in the power games of the tyrants. Aetna took back her old name of Catana. Kamarina, which had been destroyed by Gelon, was rebuilt and repopulated, and by 452 she was wealthy enough to have introduced new coinage of high artistic merit and to have entered a successful chariot team at the Olympic Games.

In this new environment, with the large cities no longer dominant, a leader of the Sicel population named Ducetius emerged as a powerful figure, leading a nationalist, Sicel movement. Having united the local Sicels, Ducetius attacked and captured the Greek cities of

Inessa and Morgantina and invaded the territory of Akragas. The Syracusans then inflicted a heavy defeat upon him, after which Ducetius voluntarily gave himself up in Syracuse. The assembly granted him asylum, and he was banished to Corinth. But before long, Ducetius was back in Sicily where he founded a new city on the north coast, *Kale Akte* (Fair Headland). He died shortly after in 440 and with him the Sicel movement.

For Syracuse, the legacy of the Deinomenid Dynasty was mixed. On the plus side were the increased power, wealth and prestige of the city, with Syracusans now a people that counted in the Greek world. On the negative side were the forced movement of people that undermined stability, the introduction of mercenaries on a grand scale and the experience of the violent rule of Thrasybulus. From now on, no general could operate without suspicion of wanting to become a tyrant, with serious consequences in times of crisis, and meaning that future attempts to seize power would require more and more ruthless methods.

Gelon's rule, in particular, lived on in the folk memory of Syracusans as a period of heroic achievement. Hiero set new standards for others to follow through his interventions abroad and patronage of arts. The expansion of the city carried out in their time, with the strengthening of fortifications and the military forces, meant that Syracuse was better prepared than ever to meet new threats.

Syracuse and the Greek cities enjoyed a peaceful period of 50 years following the banishment of Thrasybulus. As Pindar described it, Sicily was teeming with the wealthy peaks of cities. The next big shock to hit Sicily would come not from the traditional enemy Carthage, but from Athens, and it would present Syracuse with her greatest threat yet.

# CHAPTER 2

## The Athenian Expedition to Sicily

The Athenian expedition to Sicily, which took place from 415 to 413 BC with its prime target of taking Syracuse, was one of the greatest military operations of its day and proved to be an unmitigated disaster for Athens. The story of the expedition has echoed down the ages for it has all the elements of classic drama, political, military and personal. It has become a study in international relations, for while circumstances have changed beyond recognition since the fifth century BC, human psychology has not. It was claimed recently in the press that the Bush/Blair venture in Iraq was the greatest military disaster since the Athenians tried to take Syracuse. It is interesting to see that the arguments used by the pro-war parties, whether in fifth century BC Athens or twenty-first century AD Washington, have elements in common, including a grand scheme to change a region, overconfidence in their military superiority and use of a pre-emptive strike. Likewise, the sensible arguments raised by the non-interventionists were ignored. The full story of the expedition is told by Thucydides, who as an Athenian general took part in the war, though not in Sicily. His account in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a brilliant piece of war reporting, filled with quotations from speeches of the main protagonists and vivid descriptions of the action. The story unfolds as a Greek tragedy with totally unexpected events taking a hand at critical moments.

To the Syracusans, the sight of the Athenian fleet sailing into the harbour must have been terrifying, for the outcome of capitulation to a foreign army in those days was well known. Even assuming that the invaders wanted to keep the city working normally under their control, the first few days would be handed over to the troops to do their worst. The most seasoned commander was rarely able to prevent this taking place, as it was the expected payoff for the troops after the privations they had suffered during the siege. When the initial bloodbath and sacking of the city was over, parts of the population would be sold into slavery. The brutal suppression of the revolt by the island of Melos in 416, when the men of military age were executed and the women and children were sold into slavery, showed that the Athenians were quite capable of this sort of action. It must have been clear to everyone in Syracuse that this was a battle for survival.

## Athens prepares for war

Athens was still at the peak of her power and prestige in 415, only 14 years after the death of Pericles, when Alcibiades, the aristocratic politician and general, addressed the Athenian Assembly on the proposed expedition to Sicily:

In the assurance therefore that, in going abroad we shall increase our power at home, let us set out on this voyage. It will have a depressing effect on the arrogance of the Peloponnesians when they see that we despise the quiet life we are living now and have taken on the expedition to Sicily. At the same time we shall either, as is quite likely, become the rulers of all Hellas by using what we gain in Sicily, or, in any case, we shall do harm to the Syracusans, and so do good to ourselves and our allies. Our security is guaranteed by our navy, so that we can either stay there, if things go well, or come back again; for we shall have naval superiority over all the Sicilians put together.[1]

At the time Athens had been at war with Sparta for 16 years, long enough for a state of war to be considered the norm. Now there was a lull in the fighting and attention was turning elsewhere. Well before the assembly met, Alcibiades had dazzled people with his ambitious plan for Sicily. Young men met in public places to examine maps of Sicily and to discuss the reputations and fortunes to be made. His vision was to capture Syracuse and from there take control of the whole island; to use Sicily as a base to invade North Africa and take Carthage; then to return via the Peloponnese finally defeating Sparta. As Sparta got her wheat from Sicily, the expedition would have the effect of cutting off her food supply. For years Athenians had cast longing eyes at Sicily, and with their empire and thriving cultural life, they had looked down upon the Sicilian cities as provincial upstarts that could easily be conquered. Now here was a strategic plan that not only won them Sicily but also established them as the dominant power in the Mediterranean.

Alcibiades, the man behind the plan and the main instigator of the expedition, was in his mid-30s at the time and had been born into the aristocracy with the highest family connections. He was related to Pericles' family, who brought him up after his father was killed in action, while Socrates became a close friend. Described as a man of outstanding good looks, in public he showed statesmanship, ambition and intelligence and was a good speaker despite a pronounced lisp. In his military career he had proved himself an outstanding leader, brave

in action, and he had been successful in winning new allies for Athens against Sparta. All these qualities won him broad support among the masses in Athens.

Many of the leading men of Athens, on the other hand, were deeply disturbed by his arrogant and lawless behaviour, which gave him the air of a potential tyrant. From his youth scandal had never been far away and his immediate circle knew him as a heavy drinker, brawler and seducer of anyone who took his fancy. In his private life he seemed to thrive on risk. A charismatic character, brilliant and dissolute, he was capable of great things, while at the same time quite unscrupulous. It was said that there was not enough room in Greece for more than one Alcibiades.

Not everyone in Athens was convinced by his grandiose plan. According to Plutarch, even Socrates was against it and so were the priests. Among the military commanders Nicias, in particular, expressed his strong reservations. In the assembly, during the debate on the Sicilian expedition, he started by attacking Alcibiades:

No doubt there is someone sitting here who is delighted at having been chosen for the command and who, entirely for his own selfish reasons, will urge you to make the expedition – and all the more so because he is still too young for his post. He wants to be admired for the horses he keeps, and because these things are expensive, he hopes to make some profit out of his appointment. Beware of him, too, and do not give him the chance of endangering the state in order to live a brilliant life of his own. Remember that with such people maladministration of public affairs goes with personal extravagance; remember, too, that this is an important matter, and not the sort of thing that can be decided upon and acted upon by a young man in a hurry.[2]

Nicias went on to put the case for non-intervention:

Our country is now on the verge of the greatest danger she has ever known. Think of her, hold up your hands against this proposal, and vote in favour of leaving the Sicilians alone to enjoy their own country and manage their own affairs.[3]

Nicias, 55 at the time, was a well-established political figure and experienced general with several military successes to his name. In 421 he had negotiated a short-lived truce with Sparta. He was a wealthy man, having inherited a fortune from his father, which was invested mainly in silver mines, and he was reputed to own a thousand slaves. He had acquired popularity by the magnificent way

in which he carried out public services connected with the state religion of which he was a strong supporter. Cautious by nature, it was said that when in battle he would always choose the safest option. An earlier incident had strengthened his innate caution and made him aware of the risks of being a general. Paches, a general who had led a campaign in Lesbos, was ordered back to Athens to give an account of his actions, and when the proceedings went against him, drew his sword and killed himself in open court.

The Athenian Assembly voted in favour of the expedition and appointed three generals in command, Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus. Lamachus was a professional soldier rather than a politician, who had made his name under Pericles for leading a successful campaign in the Black Sea, and was renowned for his personal courage. The debate continued and Nicias requested that the resources allocated to the expedition be significantly increased. He may have hoped that when faced with the high costs involved the assembly would rethink their decision. Instead, the generals were voted full authority to equip the expedition as they thought fit. The momentum in favour of the expedition had become unstoppable.

During the debate, representatives from the pro-Athenian cities in Sicily, Segesta and Leontini, also spoke, begging for help against their enemies in Syracuse and Selinus. Segesta had also promised financial support for the expedition following an earlier visit by an Athenian delegation to Sicily. A secondary objective of assisting their allies in Sicily was set for the expedition.

Then one night in Athens acts of vandalism were carried out on many of the stone Hermae, which were found to have been disfigured with their faces cut and broken. These were a national institution, well-known figures of religious significance representing Hermes, displayed for good luck in great numbers in private houses and temples across the city. This event was taken seriously as a sacrilege, an ill omen for the expedition and as a sign that a revolution was being planned to overthrow democracy. One of those accused was Alcibiades, for reasons that are not clear, a charge probably trumped up by his enemies. Claiming his innocence, he immediately volunteered to stay in Athens to face trial, but it was decided that he should continue with the expedition.

So in the summer of 415 the fleet prepared to sail from Piraeus. Such was the popular support that almost the whole of Athens came down to the port to see them off, many of the crowd having relatives

on board. When all was ready, a trumpet sounded to silence the crowd, prayers were said, the entire force drank a libation of wine and a hymn was sung. Then the fleet put to sea, putting in first at Corcyca (Corfu), where they were joined by their allies, and the full expedition was collected together. The fleet had a total of 134 triremes, 100 from Athens, the rest from her allies, including Lesbos and Chios, while supplies and equipment were loaded onto 30 merchant ships and 100 smaller craft. The troops numbered around 30,000, between Athens and her allies. Then the expedition was divided into three sections, each one under the command of a general, and they set sail for Sicily.

## Conditions in Syracuse

Syracuse was the largest and most prosperous city in Sicily at the time, having enjoyed 50 years of peaceful conditions under democratic rule. The prosperity was reflected in the magnificence of the city's public buildings, especially the temples. At the highest point in Ortygia stood the Temple of Athena, a Doric-style building with 6 front and 14 flanking columns. A statue of Athena crowned the pediment, the goddess holding a gilded shield that reflected the sun, visible for miles around, acting as a beacon to sailors. Across the harbour on raised land stood the Olympieion, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, whose columns provided a reference point for ships entering the harbour. The area near the bridge linking Ortygia to the mainland was dominated by the great Doric Temple of Apollo, among the earliest in Sicily, built in the first half of the sixth century. Just inside the city wall on the mainland a monumental statute of Apollo could be seen at the sanctuary of Apollo Temenite. The temples' function was to house statues of the deities and the treasures dedicated to them. They were places mostly reserved for the priests. Public worship, through animal sacrifice and festivals, usually took place outside and was a part of daily life. Temples were important to the identity of the city and demonstrated the city's devotion to the gods.

Central to civic life was the theatre, which was under construction at the time of the battle of Salamis in 480. Situated on the mainland facing the Great Harbour it had a magnificent view of the bay, and in its tiers of seats cut into the solid rock, accommodated 15,000 people. The theatre's original architect was Damocopos, who sprinkled myrrh at the theatre's inauguration, and was thereafter known by the nickname Myrilla. The Syracusans became keen theatre-goers and gathered to see plays such as Aeschylus' *Persians*, first produced here

in 475, featuring the story of the Greeks' victory over the Persians in 480. Later performances included plays by Euripides, Sophocles, the Sicilian comedies of Epicarmus and readings of Pindar's poetry. Theatre dealt mostly with the legendary Greek past and was instructive as well as dramatic, with a strong moral content. Plays were dedicated to the gods, and the actors in their performance were considered to be carrying out religious rites.

Syracuse was of similar size to Athens in this period, which placed her among the largest cities in the world. The total population of Syracuse was around 300,000, about two-thirds living in the city and one-third in the hinterland.[4] The south-eastern corner of Sicily was Syracusan territory, with a long stretch of coastline and a substantial inland area. The Syracusans who lived here cultivated land, bred horses and raised livestock to feed the city. It was controlled by outposts, Helorus on the coast, Akrai and Kasmenai inland. Kamarina, an early outpost on the south coast, was now independent and was courted by both sides before coming out in favour of Syracuse.

Society was sharply divided into different strata. At the top were the aristocratic families, the landowners and providers of the cavalry, who maintained major influence in government. Also prominent were the priests, magistrates and generals, who often came from the aristocratic families. Next came the merchants, traders, artisans and the bulk of the armed forces, a large floating population that included many people from other cities in Sicily and elsewhere. Then came the poorer classes and, finally, the slaves.

At the top life was good, with large houses and country estates, the hard work being done by domestic slaves. Statues from the period and the figures on coins and vases show sophisticated people, good looking and well dressed, the women in light, flowing gowns with elegant hair styles and the men in short tunics. Rulers used the designs on coins to communicate a fashion ideal, the classic profile, the latest hair style and jewellery. Sporting achievement was much prized, and the cities vied with each other to send their best athletes and four-horse chariot teams to the Olympic Games in Greece.

Most of the population lived on the mainland, in the districts of Achradina, Neapolis and Tyche. Archaeological evidence indicates that people lived in small houses, four metres square, with stone walls and a roof of terracotta tiles or straw, with an adjoining courtyard. Clearly defined public areas were available to them, the *agora* (marketplace), *stoas* (public buildings with colonnades), public baths

and the theatre. People lived close to nature, following the seasons and raising domestic animals such as chickens and goats. They grew fruit and vegetables and went fishing. The fertile land and abundance of fish provided high-quality food, famous throughout the ancient world. Syracuse had the first school for professional chefs, and the first recorded cookbook was written in the fifth century by Mithaecus, a Syracusan.

The form of democracy adopted by the city after 466 was modelled on that of Athens, with supreme authority resting in the popular assembly, which all adult males could attend. Here the city's laws and decrees were passed, foreign and military policy decided and officials appointed annually, with everyone able to have their say.

The assembly was the forum for decision making, supported by a council that did the preparatory work, and a board of 15 generals to see that policy was implemented. However, as officials were unpaid, only wealthier citizens applied which led Aristotle to classify Syracuse a 'moderate' rather than a true democracy. It appears that, in practice, leaders continued to be drawn from the wealthy elite, who succeeded in keeping effective control of the city. This meant that the perceived threat of a new tyrant emerging was always lurking below the surface, leading to suspicions of one general or another.

## The opposing military forces

The main fighting ship on both sides in the battle for Syracuse was the trireme. The Athenians had adopted it some years earlier as the mainstay of their navy and making modifications to a Corinthian design, settled on a ship with maximum dimensions of 40 metres long by 6 metres wide. The result was a light, fast and sturdy vessel, which relied mostly on oarsmen for its power, placed in three banks, each man pulling one oar. In action it became a battering ram and fighting platform, combining speed with manoeuvrability. The triremes would use sail when winds were favourable for longer voyages, while in battle only the oars were used and speeds of up to six to seven knots were reached, with a maximum of ten knots for short periods. The crew had 200 men: the captain and his officers, 170 oarsmen, 13 sailors, 10 marines and a flautist to set the rowing pace with his flute. The design left no room for storage and the crew was dependent on supply ships for food and water, while the lack of space required them to go ashore to rest. Athens was famous as a maritime power and her navy was the best in Greece. Syracuse would be tested to the full in

the naval battles to come.

The trireme was also the main warship in Syracuse, where 100 were built sometime before the expedition. They would have required total crews of 20,000 men, and the area around the port must have been full of their barracks. For the most part crews were not galley slaves, as a high degree of skill and training was required. The men were either enlisted or, attracted to the city for employment, signed up for periods of service in return for low pay with a chance to share in booty.

The Athenians had developed military tactics based on the tight formation of infantry called a phalanx. It was made up of hoplites (from *hoplon*, the Greek word for weapon), individual foot soldiers who wore a heavy helmet and breastplate, with a spear, 2.7 metres in length, and short sword for weapons, and who carried a circular shield, one metre across. Hoplites formed up in lines with their large shields protecting one another and attacked head on, seeking the enemy's weak points with their spears. Hoplites were highly trained, for success depended upon the discipline of keeping the line together. Battles were short, and when the line broke, on one side or the other, the troops on the losing side generally dropped their equipment and fled, usually without being pursued, so that casualties were relatively low. Standard practice was for two armies to meet for a set-piece battle on neutral ground. This had been developed in Greece to limit damage to crops and olive trees, laboriously cultivated in terraces on the hillside, which could ruin whole communities. The staging of formal battles, fought to a conclusion, averted this risk.

The Athenian army consisted of citizen-soldiers, mostly farmers, who financed their own equipment and who had a stake in their city's fortunes. The system had many advantages and was much praised by the Greeks in comparison to the Persian conscript army that had to be whipped into line, and it was thought, in comparison to the Sicilians who tended to use mercenaries. The Athenians were not, however, used to long campaigns as their soldiers had to maintain their farms, so that the two years of the campaign in Sicily were to put severe strains upon their army. The Athenians had other, lighter armed troops on their expedition, but counted mainly on the hoplites, who had recent experience against the Spartans and who had served them well. But the Athenians were now embarking upon a colonial war in unfamiliar territory.

In Syracuse, the military situation was rather different. Society was

not as homogeneous as in Athens, reflecting a polyglot community coming from all over southern Europe and North Africa. The early tyrants were partly responsible for this, for they had depleted the number of long-term, land-owning residents by making wholesale shifts in the population to protect themselves. Reliance upon mercenaries was another inheritance from the tyrants. While hoplites formed the core of the army, cavalry played a significant role, as did the auxiliary troops, lightly armed infantry, archers and slingers. The auxiliaries were not effective against the phalanx, protected by shields, but their barrage of arrows and lead shot could be devastating at close range in less formal battle conditions. As a result, Syracuse had a more diverse army than that of Athens, part mercenary, part local recruits, with different units that brought their own particular skills reflecting the ethnic groups living in the city. She also had a substantial force of cavalry and a supply of horses from the nearby countryside.

In the battle for Syracuse, each side fielded around 40,000 combatants.[5] Both sides included significant contingents from their allies with the majority coming from the two leading cities. Generals were responsible for both army and navy, for at this time no distinction was made between land and sea commands.

The Athenians must have been impressed with their first sight of Syracuse and her superb natural position. To their right as they entered the harbour lay Ortygia, the old town, built on a narrow promontory jutting out into the sea covered with buildings, the walls rising in a sheer line from the sea. To their left was the point Plemmirio, just over a kilometre across from Ortygia, and beyond that opened the bay, sweeping around in an arc before reaching the walls of the city. The flat land around the harbour was wooded and there were marshes where the Anapo and Ciane rivers flowed into the harbour. Behind Ortygia to the north lay the Little Harbour, which contained shipyards and docks linked to the waterways between Ortygia and the mainland, all within the city walls. Directly in front, behind the harbour, rose the walls of the mainland city along the Achradina district, with the perimeter wall stretching up the hill to a ridge of limestone rock, the Epipoli, protecting the city from the north. There was no obvious weakness in the city's defences.

## The Athenians arrive in Sicily

When news of the impending invasion reached Syracuse, the initial

reaction was one of disbelief. Some people did not believe there was a fleet at all, while others argued that Athens would not attack them when already at war with Sparta. On the other hand, it was clear to everyone that Syracuse's allegiance was to the Doric cities of Corinth and Sparta, so that the enmity of Athens, given the long running war with Sparta, was not totally unexpected.

Hermocrates, an experienced Syracusan general, in a speech in the assembly in Syracuse, set out to rally opinion in support of urgent action to defend the city.

The fact, surprising as it seems to you, is that the Athenians have set out against you with a very large force, both military and naval. Ostensibly this is because they are allies of Segesta and they wish to restore Leontini, but in reality it is because they want Sicily, and particularly this city of ours, since they think that, once they have conquered Syracuse, they will easily get hold of the rest of the island. Make up your minds, then, that they will soon be here, and now consider how you can best meet them with the resources available.[6]

Hermocrates had for some time noted Athenian ambitions in Sicily. Nine years earlier he had foiled an attempt by Athens to get involved in the affairs of Sicily by persuading a number of Sicilian cities to make peace amongst themselves. A man of integrity, he was a patriot who acted in the interests of Syracuse and the wider Greek community in Sicily. He also showed military skill and personal bravery. After the experience of the Deinomenid tyranny, however, any successful general was viewed with some suspicion and Hermocrates was no exception. Diocles, one of the most prominent leaders, was consistently against him. Another opponent, Athenagoras of the populist party, told the assembly not to heed Hermocrates' warning, as the Athenian attack was probably only a rumour.

Then news began to arrive from their own intelligence officers that the Athenian fleet had reached the Italian coast at Rhegium, just across the straits from Sicily. At this, the Syracusans set about improving their city's defences and prepared for war.

When the Athenian fleet reached Sicily, Lamachus, the Athenians' most professional general, wanted to besiege Syracuse immediately using Megara as their base, saying that this was when the city was most vulnerable, before they had more time to prepare the defences. Alcibiades preferred to build alliances with other cities first before committing himself to battle. This was the chosen course of action, and the Athenians made their way to Catana, up the east coast north

of Syracuse, to make camp.

On arrival at Catana, they found the *Salaminia*, a fast state trireme sent from Athens with orders to take Alcibiades back to Athens to face charges of defacing the Hermae statues. His enemies had been busy in his absence and had succeeded in getting him recalled. To avoid causing a disturbance among the troops, the Athenians did not place Alcibiades under arrest, but allowed him to follow their ship in one of his own. During the voyage he gave them a slip and set off for Sparta. Athens passed the death sentence upon him in his absence.

The Athenians' next move in Sicily was to contact their allies in Segesta with the aim of collecting the money promised for the expedition. They also hoped to win Selinus over to their side. The fleet was divided into two, with one group of ships sailing along the north coast to Segesta, and the other to the south and Selinus. The results were not encouraging. On arrival at Segesta it quickly became apparent that the promised funds did not exist. Segestan support for the expedition was to be minimal. At Selinus the Athenians met with a stony response and shortly after they left, Selinus declared allegiance to Syracuse.

In autumn 415 the Athenians were ready to attack Syracuse. By withdrawing some of their troops from their camp they managed to lure the Syracusans to attack Catana. At the same time the main force sailed for Syracuse and landed near the Olympieion, on the western shore of the Great Harbour, facing the city. The Syracusans came back hurriedly, and the first pitched battle of the campaign was fought outside the city. The battle was a confrontation between troops in close formation, which put a premium upon the skills of the hoplites. The Athenians lined up with their allies on each wing, while the Syracusan line, which represented almost her entire army, was supported by 1,200 cavalry. The Athenians' experience showed and they came out the victors, losing 50 men to the Syracusans' 260. Syracusan cavalry prevented the victory being exploited and Nicias, showing excessive caution, withdrew his forces to Catana for the winter. There was to be no more fighting that year.

Hermocrates, the Syracusan general, once again set out to raise morale among his troops who had been shaken by the professionalism of the Athenian soldiers:

It was not the case of their spirit having been subdued; what had done the harm was their lack of discipline. Even then they had not been so much outclassed as might have been expected, especially if one

considered that they were themselves, as it were, amateurs in the art of war and had been fighting against the most experienced troops in Hellas. What had done great harm, too, was the number of the generals, (there were fifteen of them) and the fact that there were too many people giving orders, while the men in the ranks were disorganised and indisciplined.[7]

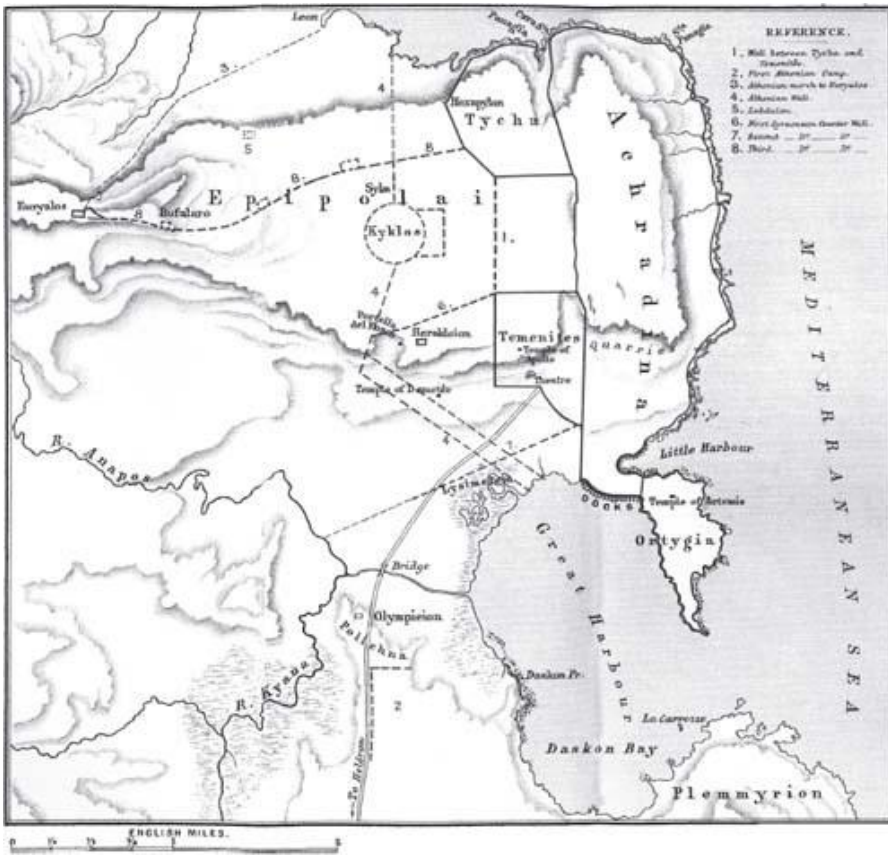
He went on to recommend a new command structure under three generals, himself, Heraclides and Sicanus, together with a programme of intensive military training. This was all agreed. Relieved to see that the Athenians had withdrawn, the Syracusans set about restructuring and training their forces as well as rebuilding parts of the city's defences, in particular the walls facing the Great Harbour. A decision was taken to avoid set-piece battles in future while a picked force of 600 men was placed to defend the Epipoli heights above the city. Hermocrates also used this period for more diplomacy, sending for help from Sparta and Corinth and the cities of eastern Sicily.

Now established in Sparta, Alcibiades began actively to support the Syracusan cause against Athens as a means of getting back at his enemies who had forced him into exile. He underlined the importance of saving Syracuse from the invaders:

The Sicilians lack the experience which Athens has, but might even now survive if they all united together. The Syracusans by themselves, however, whose total force has already been defeated in one battle and who are at the same time blockaded by sea, will not be able to hold out against the Athenian forces now in Sicily. And if Syracuse falls, all Sicily falls with it, and Italy soon afterwards. It would not then be long before you were confronted with the dangers which I have just told you threatened you from the west. So do not imagine that it is only the question of Sicily that is under discussion; it will be the question of the Peloponnese unless you quickly take the following measures: you must send out to Sicily a force of troops that are able to row the ships themselves and to take the field as hoplites as soon as they land; and – what I consider even more useful than the troops – you must send out a commander, a regular Spartan officer to organise the troops that are there already and to force into the service those who are shirking their duty.[8]

He added that if Sicily were conquered, an invasion of the Peloponnese would follow, and he urged them to fortify Decelea, a town near Athens. The Spartans reacted by appointing Gylippus, a seasoned commander, to head the forces in Syracuse and prepared

reinforcements to send out under his command.




Syracuse during the Athenian siege.

## The battle for Syracuse

In spring of the following year, 414, Nicias was ready to start the siege of Syracuse in earnest. Following his request to Athens, his force had been strengthened with the arrival of 250 riders and 30 mounted archers, the horses needing to be found in Sicily. The battle focussed on the city walls extending from the seafront in the Great Harbour to the heights at Epipoli. In a surprise attack, the Athenians managed to out manoeuvre the Syracusans, and take the heights of Epipoli. Then they began to build a wall to blockade the city and to prevent access to the interior of the island, thus cutting off a source of supply and reinforcements. Demoralised by this prospect, the Syracusan Assembly met and dismissed Hermocrates and his generals, appointing a new team of three, Heraclides, Eucles and Tellias. The assembly was close to discussing how an end could be brought to the war.

Soon after this, Gylippus arrived with reinforcements from Sparta, forced his way into the city and took command in Syracuse. At first Gylippus did not make a good impression in his Spartan cloak and long hair, but the Syracusans were soon won over. In a short time morale lifted, defeatist talk ended and the balance of the campaign changed. Hermocrates took the position of political adviser to Gylippus. Battles were fought around the city walls where the Athenians had constructed a double wall known as 'the Circle' to encircle Syracuse and to isolate her from the rest of the island. Eventually, Gylippus broke out of the encirclement. More reinforcements arrived for Syracuse from Corinth. Nicias did not press further, but fortified the area across the Great Harbour known as Plemmirio that controlled the entrance, building three forts.

At this point Nicias made a pessimistic summary of his position, which he thought to be increasingly precarious. The marshes at the mouth of the Anapo River, close to the Athenian camp, bred disease as well as sickness; his troops were suffering from lack of water and supplies, as whenever they came on shore they were attacked. By contrast, Syracuse had access to additional manpower and fresh supplies overland from their allies in Sicily. Nicias sent a letter to Athens, which was read to the assembly, outlining the difficulties he was facing:

Now owing to the superior numbers of the enemy, we are forced to remain inactive and have had to give up the building of the blockading wall. In fact we cannot make use of our total force, since a large part of our hoplites must be employed in the defence of our own lines. The enemy meanwhile have built a single wall and carried it past the end of our fortifications, so that there is now no longer any possibility of our being able to blockade the city, unless a strong force could be found to attack and capture this wall of theirs. The position therefore is that we, who thought we were the besiegers, have become in fact the besieged, at least on land, since we cannot go far into the country because of their cavalry.[9]

His conclusion was that there were now two choices, to withdraw or to send out large reinforcements. He also asked to be relieved of his command on medical grounds, as he was suffering from kidney disease. Athens refused him permission either to withdraw or to be relieved of his command. Instead, they prepared to send a relief force consisting of some 70 ships, with 5,000 hoplites and many auxiliaries, under two generals, Eurymedon and Demosthenes.

The focus of the battle in 413 turned to the Great Harbour. Before the Athenian reinforcements arrived, Gylippus sent out troops by night to attack the forts in Plemmirio and succeeded in taking all three. This was a serious blow to the Athenians who had used them to store vital equipment for their ships, including spare masts and sails, as well as grain. The Athenians could now no longer bring supplies into the harbour without a fight, for with the capture of Plemmirio the Syracusans controlled the entrance. Gylippus, supported by Hermocrates, encouraged the Syracusans to fight at sea, where the Athenians thought themselves to be invincible and were thus vulnerable to a daring attack.

The Athenians attacked the Syracusan ships held in the Little Harbour, on the eastern side of Ortygia. The Syracusans drove stakes into the seabed, some of which were cut off below the waterline to be invisible, to prevent them getting near their ships. The Athenians replied by approaching in small boats and sending down divers to remove the stakes. Damage to the ships was limited and the Syracusans were able to carry out running repairs under the protection of the city walls and also to make an important modification on the advice of the Corinthian pilot, Ariston. This was to strengthen the prows of their ships, making them shorter and lower, which gave them a crucial advantage. The Athenian ships with their higher prows inflicted damage above the waterline, while the Syracusan ships, with this modification, could now sink the enemy with one ram. Reinforcements continued to arrive for Syracuse, this time from Kamarina, consisting of 1,100 hoplites, javelin throwers and archers, and from Gela, with crews for 5 ships, 400 javelin throwers and 200 cavalry. Now only Akragas, of the main cities in Sicily, remained neutral.

Gylippus then launched a two-pronged attack, on land at the Epipoli wall above the city and in the harbour by ship, where his 80 ships met 60 of the enemy. In the harbour, the Athenians were successful, losing only 3 ships to the Syracusans' 11. Gylippus, who commanded the land forces, defeated the Athenians, capturing two forts. The sea battle continued shortly afterwards with the arrival of Demosthenes and Eurymedon with reinforcements from Athens. The battle was fought for two days without result until the Athenians were tricked into thinking the Syracusans had withdrawn. This was a feint and the Syracusan ships returned to the battle with the enemy unprepared. Attacking prow to prow they stove in the Athenian bows,

while their javelin throwers caused many casualties on deck. Young Syracusan boys rowed out in small boats to the Athenian ships and, slipping under their oars, fired slingshots at the sailors. These tactics won the Syracusans a significant victory.

Demosthenes stepped up the battle on land with his fresh troops, laying waste the area around the Anapo River with no resistance. Next he turned his attention to the city walls, and making use of siege engines, succeeded in breaking through on the Epipoli Ridge. Here the fighting went in favour of the Athenians, and the force of 600 men placed there by Gylippus was overwhelmed. The Athenians followed up with further advances until, beginning to think victory was theirs, they lost cohesion and discipline. Heavy fighting continued, in which Hermocrates took part, and in a counter-attack the Boeotian allies of Syracuse held the Athenians and then put them to flight. By now night had fallen and the Athenians, retreating in disorder down the hill, lost their way in the rocky territory below Epipoli. It became a rout, and they were pursued down to the harbour where heavy casualties were inflicted upon them by the Syracusan cavalry.

The Athenians withdrew to their camp to take stock. Most of the troops had been in Sicily for two years and by now were weakened by sickness and lack of drinking water, much of which had been cut off by the Syracusans. Nicias himself was partly incapacitated by kidney disease. Seeing all this, together with the strong defence put up by Syracuse, led Demosthenes to suggest cutting their losses and returning to Athens. Nicias did not agree. He feared being impeached and preferred taking his luck in the field to returning to Athens with nothing to show for two years' campaigning. He was also influenced by regular news he received from a party of traitors in Syracuse who kept advising him not to give up, and that at the right moment they would find a way to let the Athenians into the city. They were on the point of withdrawing to their main camp in Catana when, in late August 413, an eclipse of the moon took place. This made a big impression on the Athenians, and Nicias, a particularly superstitious man, consulted his soothsayers who interpreted it as an omen requiring them to stay put.

Morale in Syracuse was now high. Gylippus had no intention of letting the enemy withdraw to other locations in Sicily from where they could continue to cause trouble. So he launched an attack first on the Athenian camp, which was partially successful, and then on the Athenian navy in the Great Harbour. Athenian ships that landed on

shore were attacked by Gylippus' men who succeeded in disabling 18 of them. During this battle Eurymedon, the Athenian general, was killed. The Syracusans then blockaded the entrance to the harbour with a line of ships chained together from Ortygia to Plemmirio, just over a kilometre across, blocking access to the open sea, with the entire Athenian fleet inside the harbour.

## Defeat of the Athenians

The Athenians were now in a desperate situation. Leaving only their sick and wounded on shore, they took to their ships for the decisive battle. This was fought by around 100 ships on each side, in cramped conditions with frequent collisions and little room for manoeuvre that favoured the Syracusans' tactics of ramming enemy ships head on. As one ship bore down upon another, javelins, arrows and stones were shot or hurled onto it continuously by the troops on deck. Once the ships met, each tried to board the other amid fierce hand-to-hand fighting. The battle raged for some time with no clear winner, watched from the city walls by the Syracusans, eager for an even greater victory than they had won so far, and by the Athenians, increasingly desperate as they watched their means of retreat, their navy, being destroyed. Finally, the Syracusans and their allies broke Athenian resistance and forced their ships towards the shore. They followed them with great shouting and cheering as the Athenians fled from their ships back to their camp.

Hermocrates saw there was an immediate danger that the enemy could force a retreat overland as his own soldiers were exhausted by the battle. So he sent his spies to the Athenian camp warning them not to attempt a breakout that night as troops were already guarding the way. The Athenians decided to stay put until the morning. The Syracusans used the time to set up roadblocks and ambushes along the routes the Athenians were likely to take. They also towed away and burned many of the Athenian ships beached on shore to prevent any further use of the fleet.

It was a grim scene at the Athenian camp next day as 40,000 men, those still able to walk, collected themselves to retreat overland to their camp at Catana. The dead were left unburied, while sick and wounded men lay around crying for help but had to be abandoned as each man could only take what could be easily carried on a long march. They set off in two groups under Nicias and Demosthenes. Rivers offered a natural line of retreat but the Anapo, not far from the

camp, was blocked by the Syracusans, so they were forced to head further inland, climbing the rocky hillside. There the two groups split up, and after three days march the remains of Demosthenes' group, some 6,000 men, clashed with a force of Syracusans, was surrounded and forced to surrender. Nicias and the rest of the Athenians turned south and joining the coast road pressed on to the Asinaro River which they crossed, establishing themselves on high ground on the far side. Desperate for drinking water, they returned to the river and were surprised by a large force of Syracusans. They fought their way up the river and found themselves in a dried-out section, headed by a gorge. In front was a large body of Syracusans, and any attempt to go forward was met with a furious onslaught of missiles. They tried to retreat but this was cut off by more troops. Caught in the middle with no cover, it became a killing field with no escape and the Athenians were massacred, the worst defeat of the entire war. Nicias surrendered to Gylippus, hoping that his earlier dealings with the Spartans would help his cause. The date of the surrender was mid-September 413.

The Athenian prisoners, around 7,000, were taken back to Syracuse and marched through the city while the assembly met to decide their fate. Hermocrates and Gylippus wanted to spare the generals, but Diocles spoke strongly against them and the assembly decided they should be put to death. This decision may have been influenced by those who had dealt with Nicias and who feared their names might be revealed if he were interrogated under torture. Shortly afterwards, Nicias and Demosthenes were executed. The prisoners were taken to the *latomie* (the stone quarries), deep excavations in the rock forming a natural enclosure, open to the elements. There they passed a miserable ten weeks in terrible conditions on starvation rations, half a pint of water and a pint of corn per head per day, crowded into a small space through the heat of the day and the cold of the night, many dying of wounds, malnutrition and disease. It was said that a lucky few who could recite Euripides were set free owing to the Syracusans' love of theatre. After ten weeks the survivors were released and sold into slavery.

## Epilogue

For Athens, the expedition marked the beginning of the end of her independence, for as well as depleting her resources, it brought Persia once more into a war against her, and in April 404, she surrendered to the Spartans. Thucydides ends his account of the Athenian expedition as follows:

This was the greatest Hellenic action that took place during this war, and, in my opinion, the greatest action that we know of in Hellenic history – to the victors the most brilliant of successes, to the vanquished the most calamitous of defeats; for they were utterly and entirely defeated; their sufferings were on an enormous scale; their losses were, as they say, total; army, navy everything was destroyed, and, out of many, only few returned. So ended the events in Sicily.[10]

In the interim years, Athens did gain some victories against her enemies and playing a part in these was Alcibiades. Forced to leave Sparta where he had seduced King Agis' wife when the king was away with his army and having a child by her, he was recalled to Athens to command the navy. In 410 he won a significant victory at Cyzicus, in the Sea of Marmora, and in the following year recaptured Byzantium. A triumphant return to Athens followed, but the reconciliation was short-lived, and by 404 Alcibiades was on the run in Phrygia with an order from Sparta to have him put out of the way. When a group of soldiers finally caught up with him, he awoke one day to find his house on fire. Wrapping his cloak around him and grabbing his sword, he rushed out to confront his enemies and was killed in the ensuing fight.

Gylippus returned in triumph to Sparta but later met his downfall in a financial scandal. Unable to resist the temptation of helping himself to state funds that he had been entrusted to deliver to Sparta, he passed the rest of his life in exile.

Hermocrates continued to fight against Athens and commanded a Syracusan fleet that was sent to help the Peloponnesians in the Aegean. After being defeated, he was dismissed and sent into exile. When the Carthaginians threatened Syracuse in 407, Hemocrates returned to help, was refused entry and in trying to force his way into the city, he was killed. One of his bodyguards, a young man left for dead at the scene, recovered and as Dionysius I, went on to rule Syracuse for 38 years and to become one of the leading figures in the

fourth century.

# CHAPTER 3

## Dionysius I: Tyrant and Warlord

Dionysius was elected *Strategos Autokrator*, General with Supreme Power, by Syracuse in 405 at the age of 25. By the end of his long rule in 367 he was the undisputed master of Sicily with influence extending abroad through outposts in mainland Italy and interventions in the affairs of Greece herself. He and his sons were made honorary citizens of Athens in 368 in recognition of his international status. Under his rule Syracuse became the largest and most powerful city of the Greek world, and his achievements in government left their imprint on the city for the next 200 years.

When Dionysius came to power the Carthaginians were rampaging through Sicily, bringing crisis once more to Syracuse. He rapidly proved himself as a military leader, showing precocious ability for someone who had no previous experience of commanding an army. He was to develop into a formidable commander, a good planner and organiser who inspired his troops. Among his innovations was the concept of an armed force with mixed skills, army, navy, cavalry, artillery, heavy and light infantry, which he used effectively. Dionysius was a big man, strong and active, combining daring with intelligence.

Cicero noted the contradictions in his character:

Yet we have the written record of reliable authorities about him, that there was the utmost moderation in his way of life, and that he was energetic and hard-working in the conduct of affairs, yet at the same time villainous and unjust by nature. Consequently, to all those with a correct view of the truth he must appear most wretched. Those every things which he had been longing for he could not secure even at the time when he thought himself all-powerful.

He was of good parentage and a respectable origin (though in fact there are different versions of this). He had very many friends among his contemporaries, and relatives to whom he was attached. He also had in Greek fashion some young men as lovers. Yet he trusted none of them, but entrusted his physical protection to those whom he had chosen when slaves from the households of the rich – he himself had removed the title of slave from them – and to some immigrants and wild barbarians.[1]

His name, which was common at the time, was taken from the god Dionysus, one of the Olympian gods, son of Zeus and Semele, who represented the life force and fertility, religious ecstasy and wine and was much venerated in ancient times. The cult of Dionysus was also closely linked to the Greek theatre. His father was called Hermocritus (not to be confused with Hermocrates, the Syracusan general and hero of the Athenian War) and probably came from an aristocratic family. Dionysius started work as a clerk, implying that he was an educated man. Young Dionysius was much influenced by Hermocrates, from whom he learned a lot. His first wife was one of Hermocrates' daughters.

## The legends of Dionysius

Dionysius was a showman who loved power, and he liked to be seen in his *quadriga* drawn by four white horses. His power and the magnificence of his court in the palace he built for himself in Ortygia gave rise to numerous legends that appear in the pages of the ancient writers. Whether true or false, and we have no way of telling either way, the legends provide a picture of how Dionysius was seen in ancient times.

One of the most famous is the story of Damocles, told by Cicero. Damocles was a courtier who one day complimented Dionysius on his power and luxurious life. Dionysius turned to him and said:

Well then, Damocles, since this kind of life attracts you, would you like to taste it for yourself and test my good fortune?

Damocles readily agreed and all was prepared for him to experience how life as Dionysius was like. He was placed on a golden couch, perfumes were burned, the tables were heaped with the choicest dishes. In the middle of this lavishness, Dionysius ordered a gleaming sword fastened to a horse hair to be let down from the ceiling so as to hang over the neck of Damocles. Dionysius made it clear that there was no happiness for the man under constant threat of violent death. Damocles rapidly returned to his role as courtier.[2]

Cicero also noted Dionysius' paranoia about being shaved:

Besides, so as to avoid trusting his neck to a barber, he taught his daughters to shave him. So with a lowly and menial skill the royal maidens shaved their father's beard and hair, as if they were hairdressers' assistants. Even so he took the metal razor away from them when they grew up, and made it the practice that they should

singe his beard and hair with white-hot walnut shells.[3]

The story of the friendship between Damon and Phintias was widely known in the ancient world and was quoted by several writers. Diodorus gives us this account:

So, for example, while Dionysius was tyrant and a certain Phintias, a Pythagorean, who had formed a plot against the tyrant, was about to suffer the penalty for it, he asked Dionysius for time in which to make such disposition as he wished of his private affairs; and he said that he would give one of his friends as surety for his death. And when the ruler expressed his wonder whether such a friend was to be found as would take his place in prison, Phintias called upon one of his acquaintances, a Pythagorean philosopher named Damon, who without hesitation came forward at once as surety for his death.

Now there were some who expressed approval of so great a love for one's friends, whereas some charged the surety with rashness and folly. And at the appointed hour all the people ran together, anxious to learn whether the man who had provided a surety for himself would keep faith. When the hour drew close and all were giving up hope, Phintias unexpectedly arrived on the run at the last moment, just as Damon was being led off to his fate. Such a friendship was in the eyes of all men a thing of wonder, and Dionysius remitted the punishment of the condemned man, urging the two men to include himself as a third in their friendship.[4]

## Aftermath of the Athenian War

After victory over the Athenians in September 413 Syracuse celebrated, honouring the soldiers who had fought with distinction and rewarding the cities which had supported her. The city's temples were embellished with dedications and arms taken from the enemy, which included a fine shield belonging to Nicias, the Athenian general. In commemoration an annual festival was introduced, the Asinarian Games, and silver medallions of exceptional quality were struck. Sparta, whose support had been crucial, received booty taken from the Athenians, while a fleet of 35 triremes under the command of Hermocrates was sent to help her in the continuing war with Athens. Democracy was strengthened by a new set of laws, *The Laws of Diocles,* named after the man who introduced them. The strength of the city had, however, been greatly weakened by the fighting and there was no indemnity from Athens, as there had been in Gelon's day

from Carthage, to pay for reconstruction.

In 410 fighting broke out in the west of Sicily between Segesta and Selinus. These two Greek cities had remained enemies, and to repay Segesta for supporting Athens in the recent war, Selinus decided to increase her territory at Segesta's expense. Segesta appealed to Carthage for help. Carthage elected as general one of their foremost citizens, Hannibal, grandson of Hamilcar who died at the battle of Himera (not to be confused with the later Hannibal who fought the Romans) and under his command sent a force of around 50,000 men in 60 warships to Sicily. They landed at Lilybaeum (Marsala) and made their way down the coast to Selinus, which they put under siege. When the Selinuntians saw the force of Carthaginians outside their city, they sent urgent appeals for help to Syracuse and Akragas, but none was forthcoming.

Fierce fighting went on for nine days, the Carthaginians using towers to assault the walls and battering rams to break down the gates; the Selinuntians defending their city desperately, street by street. Eventually the Carthaginians broke in and a slaughter took place; 16,000 inhabitants died and 5,000 were taken prisoner. Only 2,600 managed to escape to Akragas. When the news reached Syracuse, ambassadors were sent to Hannibal asking him to spare the temples and to release the prisoners. Both requests were refused. The walls and buildings of the city were destroyed and the prisoners, including women and children, were kept as slaves. Selinus, as a Greek city, ceased to exist.

Hannibal now took his army north to Himera, the scene of his grandfather's defeat and death that he was eager to avenge, and besieged the city. Syracuse and Akragas sent a force of 4,000 troops under Diocles to the aid of Himera. However, after initial skirmishes, it became clear that the Carthaginian force was overwhelming and Diocles took his men back to defend Syracuse, evacuating by ship en route some of the inhabitants of Himera. Hannibal took his revenge. Himera was sacked, the temples destroyed and the city razed to the ground. Most of the remaining inhabitants were slaughtered, the surviving women and children divided up as slaves. Three thousand men were led to the spot where Hamilcar had died, were tortured and put to death. Hannibal then sailed back to Carthage, with his army and much booty, where he was received as a hero.

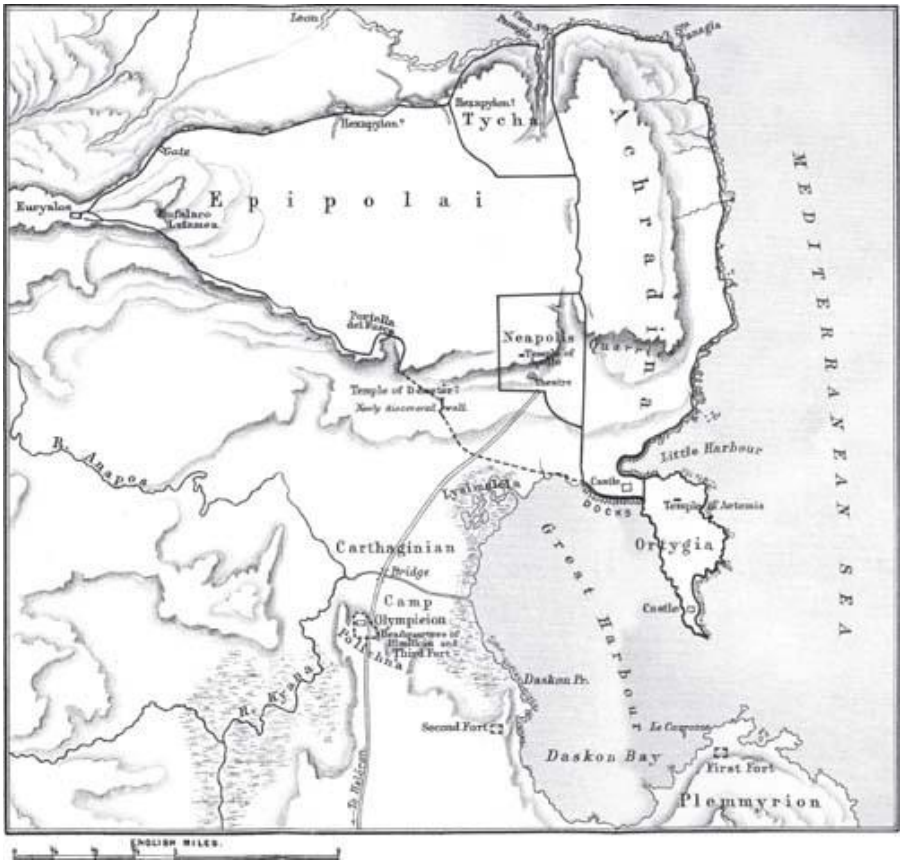
Hermocrates, who had been exiled from Syracuse, saw an opportunity to return to Sicily in this new crisis. Arriving in Messana

he built up a force of 6,000 soldiers including men from Selinus and Himera with the aim of protecting the Greek cities from further destruction. He settled for some time in the remains of Selinus, where he rebuilt part of the fortifications. Hearing that his supporters in Syracuse wanted him back, he set off via Himera where he collected the bones of the Syracusan dead for reburial in the city. However, several Syracusan leaders including Diocles, who was later sent into exile, opposed his return. Hermocrates decided that the moment had come to seize power by force and entered the city with a few followers. His enemies were waiting for him, as Diodorus tells us:

But when the Syracusans heard what had happened, they gathered in the market-place under arms, and here, since they appeared accompanied by a great multitude, they slew Hermocrates and most of his supporters. Those who had not been killed in the fighting were brought to trial and sentenced to exile; consequently some of them who had been severely wounded were reported by their relatives as having died, in order that they might not be given over to the wrath of the multitude. Among their number was also Dionysius, who later became tyrant of the Syracusans.[5]

## Dionysius seizes power

The Carthaginians returned to Sicily in 406 under the generals Hannibal and Himilco. Their objective this time was Akragas. This city had become very prosperous on its trade with Carthage to which it supplied produce such as olive oil, olives, fruit and vegetables. According to Diodorus, the Temple of Zeus in Akragas was the largest in Sicily, and the city's population was comparable to that of Syracuse. Tellias, one of the richest citizens, was said to have a fabulous wine cellar with casks cut out of the rock containing a capacity of over one thousand amphorae. As the Carthaginians approached, as was their habit, they destroyed tombs and monuments that they found outside the city, to the fury of the Greeks. Shortly afterwards, plague broke out killing many of the Carthaginians, including Hannibal.




Syracuse under Dionysius I.

Fearing a repeat of the disasters at Selinus and Himera, the Syracusans sent a mixed force of 30,000 troops to aid the city, under General Daphnaeus. Together with the people of Akragas they held the Carthaginians and at one stage put them to flight. The opportunity to follow this success up was not seized by the generals, who decided that the grain supply was too low for the city to withstand a siege and that it should be abandoned. Most of the population fled to Gela and Syracuse. When Himilco finally took the city, the remaining inhabitants were killed. The Carthaginians remained in Akragas through the winter and before leaving the following year destroyed the city and the temples by fire.

In the assembly in Syracuse, furious denunciations of the generals' actions in Akragas were made, supported by Dionysius, who accused the generals of treachery. With popular support and the backing of Philistus, a wealthy Syracusan, Dionysius was despatched to Gela, the next city in danger, with a force of 2,000 infantry and 400 cavalry. Here he succeeded in rallying support against the Carthaginians.

Returning to Syracuse, he achieved his aim of being appointed *Strategos Autokrator*, General with Supreme Power, and moved quickly and ruthlessly to consolidate his position. His two most influential opponents, Daphnaeus and Demarchus, were executed; mercenaries' pay was doubled, exiles were recalled to support his cause and close followers were placed in key positions. A permanent bodyguard of 600 men was established for his personal protection.

Returning to defend Gela with an increased military force, Dionysius came to the same conclusion as the generals at Akragas that the city could not be defended, and the population of Gela was evacuated. The same thing was repeated at Kamarina, whose citizens were compelled to leave for Syracuse. These actions of Dionysius prompted a revolt among some of his army, in particular the cavalry, who tried to ambush him near Gela, and then raided his house in Syracuse, violating his wife, who was so mistreated that she took her own life. Dionysius returned to Syracuse by night, and with his mercenaries took control of the centre of the city. All those suspected of taking part in the revolt were put to death. The main body of cavalry fled from Syracuse and took up residence in Aetna.

Himilco then called for peace and a treaty was drawn up. The inhabitants of Selinus, Akragas, Himera, Gela and Kamarina were free to return to their cities but would pay tribute to Carthage. Dionysius was recognised as *Archon* (Ruler) of Syracuse, while all prisoners and ships taken during hostilities were to be returned. The Carthaginians sailed home having made considerable territorial gains but having lost over half their soldiers to the plague. Suspicion that Dionysius had managed these events in his own interests, betraying the smaller Greek cities in return for recognition of his position in Syracuse, was widespread. In any case he was now firmly in control of the city.

To protect his position in Syracuse, Dionysius now fortified Ortygia, building for himself a fortress on the isthmus, with the docks on either side. Within the fortress he included his treasury and quarters for his mercenaries. It became his personal base and the centre of power in the city. Commander of the Citadel was Philistus, the wealthy Syracusan who had backed him from the start.

And perceiving that the Island was the strongest section of the city and could be easily defended, he divided it from the rest of the city by an expensive wall, and in this he set high towers at close intervals, while before it he built places of business and stoas (civic buildings) capable of accommodating a multitude of the populace. He also

constructed on the Island at great expense a fortified acropolis as a place of refuge in case of immediate need and within its wall he enclosed the dockyards which are connected with the small harbour that is known as Laccium. The dockyards could accommodate sixty triremes and had an entrance that was closed off, through which only one ship could enter at a time.[6]

At the same time Dionysius rewarded the loyalty of his followers:

As for the territory of Syracuse, he picked out the best of it and distributed it in gifts to his friends as well as to higher officers, and divided the rest of it in equal portions both to aliens and to citizens, including under the name citizens the manumitted slaves, whom he designated as New Citizens. He also distributed the dwellings among the common people, except those on the island, which he gave to his friends and the mercenaries.[7]

Leptines, Dionysius' brother, was appointed to a position of senior command in the military forces.

All this was done just in time, for Dionysius then faced the most serious revolt of his rule. This took place in 404, the year that Athens surrendered to Sparta, ending the Peloponnesian War. It broke out in the army who sent for the exiled cavalry in Aetna and for help from Messana and Rhegium in Italy, who responded by sending warships to Syracuse. At one stage the tyrant was besieged in Ortygia and it looked as if he would be forced to surrender. Philistus urged him to fight on, telling him 'that it was not fitting to dash from the tyranny on a galloping horse but to be cast out, dragged by the leg'.[8]

Dionysius recovered his nerve and managed to gain permission to leave Syracuse by ship. The Syracusans, thinking the tyranny was over, relaxed their guard. Dionysius returned with his mercenaries and re-established his rule, this time keeping the killing to a minimum. Realising that this was the time for reconciliation, having dealt with the ringleaders, he offered an amnesty to the rest of the Syracusans, including the cavalry in Aetna, which ended the revolt. Once it was over, a second wall was built around the citadel in Ortygia and the size of the mercenary force was increased.

Dionysius was essentially a warlord and his rule was a period of almost continuous warfare. His aim was personal power, first in Syracuse, then Sicily and later abroad, and warfare gave his regime purpose and enabled him to strengthen and maintain his power. War also brought great wealth through booty and taxes from the acquired territories. As the Carthaginians were temporarily out of the way,

Dionysius turned his attention to the nearby Greek cities on the east coast of Sicily and took over their territory for Syracuse. Arriving with his army, Catana was occupied and garrisoned; Naxos, which defied him, was destroyed and her citizens sold into slavery; Leontini, rather than suffer the same fate, was evacuated, her citizens moving to Syracuse. In this way Dionysius became master of eastern Sicily.

Dionysius had no intention of honouring the peace treaty with Carthage, and he was planning to be the aggressor in the future. Accordingly he set out to prepare for the next stage of hostilities by improving Syracuse's defences and by building up his army and navy, in a thorough and well-planned programme. In his youth he had witnessed the early success of the Athenians in attacking the heights of Epipoli that occupy the commanding position above the city, and he was determined that this should not happen again. Fortifying this area was a massive undertaking, which showed Dionysius at his best as a leader:

Sending, therefore, for his master-builders, in accord with their advice he decided that he must fortify Epipolae at the point where there stands now the Wall with the Six Gates. For this place, which faces north, is precipitous in its entirety, and so steep that access is hardly to be won from the outside. Wishing to complete the building of the walls rapidly, he gathered the peasants from the countryside, from whom he selected some sixty thousand capable men and parcelled out to them the space to be walled. For each stade (*) he appointed a master-builder and for each plethron (#) a mason, and the labourers from the common people assigned to the task numbered two hundred for each plethron. Besides these, other workers, a multitude in number, quarried out the rough stone, and six thousand yoke of oxen brought it to the appointed place. And the united labour of so many workers struck the watchers with great amazement, since all were zealous to complete the task assigned to them.[9]

(Note: * a stade was a measurement of approximately 200 metres, being the length of the stadium in Athens. # a plethron was approximately 30 metres.)

Dionysius put great effort into motivating his workforce:

As a result, contrary to expectation, the wall was brought to completion in twenty days. It was thirty stades in length (around six kilometres) and of corresponding height; and the added strength of the wall made it impregnable to assault; for there were lofty towers at frequent intervals and it was constructed of stones four feet long and

carefully joined.[10]

The north wall was the first section completed. The full fortifications on the Epipoli ridge built by Dionysius took six years to complete (402–397) and, when linked to Ortygia, covered 27 kilometres. They included, at the western end of the ridge, the basis of the Euryalus Castle, built in a position dominating access to the city.

Dionysius next turned his attention to expanding his navy and sent his men to the slopes of Mount Etna and to the Italian mainland to collect the best fir and pinewood. This was transported to Syracuse and work began on a vast programme of shipbuilding. Two hundred new ships, including *quadriremes* (with four banks of oars) and quinqueremes (with five banks of oars) were built. Dionysius is credited with being the first to build these large warships and eventually had 30 in his navy. In addition, refitting took place of 110 existing ships. To handle this work a series of shipyards was built, mostly accommodating two vessels at a time, which could be seen spread out all round the shore of the Great Harbour. In Syracuse, arms were manufactured on a large scale to equip the army that was to receive many new recruits, particularly light infantry. Attracting skilled workmen to the city, Dionysius showed them samples of weapons used by the different nationalities among his mercenaries and set them to work. A new invention was made at this time, a weapon designed for both attack and defence, a catapult capable of throwing heavy missiles over long distances. This invention was based upon an earlier machine in use in North Africa and would play an important role in the battles to come, both in the sieges of other cities and in the defence of Syracuse.

Dionysius then established his dynasty by marriage in 398 to two women, Aristomache of Syracuse and Doris of Locri. These were dynastic unions, allying Dionysius to prominent families in Syracuse and Locri, on the Italian mainland, where Dionysius had ambitions for extending his influence. According to Plutarch:

It is said that he married both these women on the same day, and that nobody knew with which one he first consummated the marriage, but that afterwards for the rest of his life he spent an equal share of his time with each: it was his custom to dine with both of them together, and at night they shared his bed in turn. The Syracusans, however, were anxious that their own countrywoman should take precedence over the foreigner, but it was Doris' good fortune to be the first to become a mother, and thus by presenting Dionysius with his eldest

son (Dionysius II, who succeeded his father) she was able to offset her foreign birth. Aristomache, on the other hand, remained barren for a long time, although Dionysius passionately desired that she should bear him children, and he even went so far as to accuse the mother of his Locrian wife of giving her drugs to prevent conception, and had her put to death.[11]

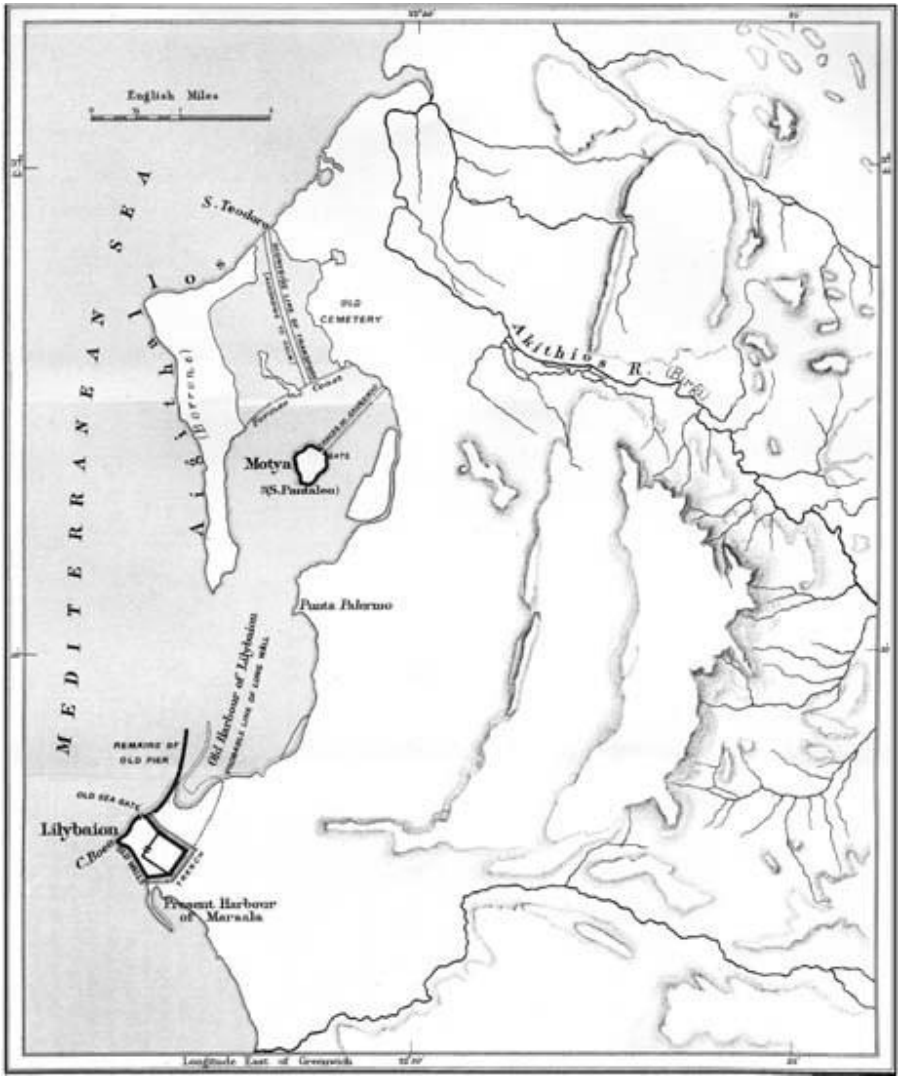
The first *quinquereme* to be built, embellished with silver and gold furnishings, was sent to Locri to bring Doris to Syracuse, while Aristomache was brought to the palace in Ortygia in a *quadriga* with four white horses. Dionysius would have two sons by Doris, Dionysius II and Hermocritus, and one, Hipparinus, by Aristomache.

After his marriage, Dionysius gave a number of dinners for his soldiers and the citizens of Syracuse at which he promised to give up the most oppressive aspects of his rule. A meeting of the assembly was then called at which Dionysius asked for support for a decisive war against the Carthaginians, while they were still weakened by the effects of the plague. Gaining full support from the Syracusans, Dionysius encouraged the seizure of property belonging to Carthaginian traders in Syracuse, a move copied by the other Greek cities in Sicily. A message was sent to Carthage: Syracuse declares war upon the Carthaginians unless they restore freedom to the Greek cities of Sicily.

## The campaign for Motya

Then in 397 Dionysius set out on the greatest campaign of his career. The target was Motya, the main Carthaginian base in Sicily, a heavily fortified island just off the west coast, a wealthy commercial centre and busy naval base. Dionysius had a large force, augmented by contingents from the Greek cities, consisting of 80,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry and nearly 200 warships, supported by 500 transports carrying siege engines and supplies. A lengthy siege took place with Dionysius employing his latest weaponry and siege techniques, which would be copied by later commanders, including, it is said, by Alexander the Great. Moles were built out to the island to support catapults that rained sharp pointed missiles into the city and siege towers from which to attack the city walls. At one stage the Carthaginian navy tried to intervene but was repulsed by the Syracusan warships under Leptines. Dionysius regularly withdrew his troops towards nightfall, until he gauged that the Motyans were used to this practice. Then he sent a detachment of elite troops under

Archylus to scale the walls by night. A huge, desperate battle developed, with hand-to-hand fighting in the streets. Eventually Motya fell, and a mass slaughter took place, the Sicilian Greeks taking revenge for the Carthaginian atrocities in their own cities. Archylus and other soldiers were rewarded for their bravery, while the prisoners were sold as booty. The Greek mercenaries who had fought on the Carthaginian side were crucified. Motya was destroyed, never to be rebuilt, for the Carthaginians transferred their base to Lilybaeum (Marsala). The plunder taken by Dionysius was immense.



Ancient Motya.

Respite from the Carthaginians was short-lived, for Himilco soon appeared with a large force and captured Messana. He proceeded

down the coast to Catana, which also fell to him. Dionysius brought his forces back to defend Syracuse, and according to Diodorus, in terror of the Carthaginians, sent his brother-in-law Polyxenus to raise help from the Greek cities, Corinth and Sparta. Himilco arrived at Syracuse with a show of force.

Himilco decked his ships with the spoils taken from the enemy and put in at the great harbour of the Syracusans, and he caused great dismay among the inhabitants of the city. For two hundred and fifty ships of war entered the harbour, with oars flashing in order and richly decked with the spoils of war; then came the merchantmen, in excess of three thousand . . . The result was that the harbour of the Syracusans, despite its great size, was blocked up by the vessels and it was almost entirely concealed from view by the sails.[12]

The Carthaginian army was then drawn up in formation outside the city, challenging the Syracusans to come out and do battle. Achradina, the residential quarter of Syracuse, was taken; the temples outside the city plundered and the tomb of Gelon destroyed. The scale of the threat drew great criticism of Dionysius and his policy, which came to a head in the assembly in a speech by a leading citizen, Theodorus: '. . . he lords it over the city, not like a magistrate dispensing justice on equal terms but like a dictator who by policy makes all decisions for his own advantage.'[13] But the groundswell of opinion against Dionysius was stopped in its tracks when officers from Sparta and Corinth spoke up in his favour.

The military situation, which was looking very dangerous for the Syracusans, suddenly changed when the plague broke out amongst the Carthaginian troops camped near the marshy land on the harbour's shore. This time it was a more virulent strain, bringing death within five to six days. It was so contagious that no one would look after the sick and the death toll rose rapidly. Dionysius took advantage, and after further fighting on land and sea, secured a major victory over the Carthaginians. With heavy losses in men and equipment, and the plague still active among his troops, Himilco negotiated a withdrawal from Syracuse for himself and a small contingent of Carthaginians. An indemnity was paid to Dionysius and most of the troops, including the sick, were left behind. Himilco returned in disgrace to Carthage, where he committed suicide.

After the war, Dionysius set out to rebuild and resettle the Greek cities. Tauromenium (Taormina) was taken, that had long held out against the Syracusans. The campaign was extended into southern

Italy, where with the support of the Locrians (allies of Dionysius via his marriage to Doris), he captured the Greek city of Rhegium after a lengthy siege. He later founded several military colonies on the Adriatic coast.

The Carthaginians returned once more under Mago and in 378 won a significant victory over Dionysius near Panormus, at which Leptines was killed. This time at the peace treaty Dionysius paid the indemnity and the Carthaginian sphere of interest was redefined to include Akragas and Selinus. Despite the victory, the Carthaginians had little to show for nearly 50 years of brutal and costly warfare; their control was restricted to a handful of cities in Sicily, while their losses in men and equipment had been huge. Destruction to Sicilian cities and countryside from the prolonged fighting was immense, with only Syracuse, among the major cities, escaping intact. The treaty left Dionysius effectively in charge of Sicily and the southern-most part of Italy.

## The later years

Dionysius showed increasing paranoia as he grew older, the years of intrigue, treachery and fighting taking their toll. It was said that for fear of assassination, he was compelled to wear an iron corselet under his tunic. At one stage two of his closest associates, his brother Leptines, and the loyal Philistus, were exiled for having displeased him. Leptines was later brought back to Syracuse. His paranoia became part of the legend, for example, in the account by Cicero of how Dionysius retired for the night with his two wives:

And he used to come to them at night only after inspecting and examining everything first. He put a broad trench round the bed where he slept, and made a crossing for the trench with a little wooden bridge. After shutting the door of the bedroom he used to twist that too aside.[14]

Dionysius took himself seriously as a poet and dramatist and in this period was able to spend more time writing. While his courtiers praised his work, others were more critical. When Philoxenus, an established poet, was frank in his judgement, Dionysius had him locked up in the quarries. An incident at the Olympic Games in Greece some years earlier illustrates what people thought of Dionysius and his poetry. Dionysius had entered several four-horse teams in the Games, complete with colourful pavilions for spectators, and had hired

professionals to read his poems to the public. His brother Thearides was sent in charge. When the poems were read out, at first they were listened to with respect, but as soon as people realised how bad they really were, loud laughter followed. Then during the races Dionysius' chariots veered off the track and crashed into each other. On the way home, the ship carrying the Syracusans sank in a storm and the story that reached Syracuse was that the appalling verse was to blame for all the disasters.

Plato's visit to Syracuse in 388 provides another insight into Dionysius and his court. Plato had come to southern Italy to consult the Pythagorean philosopher Archytas and continued his journey to Syracuse. He was about 40 at the time and had not yet founded his academy in Athens. The meeting between the two men, the foremost political thinker of his day, and the most powerful ruler in the western Mediterranean, was not a success, for the man Plato met was a far cry from his ideal of a philosopher-king. Plato recorded his thoughts on arrival in his Seventh Letter:

My first impressions on arrival were those of strong disapproval – disapproval of the kind of life which was there called the life of happiness, stuffed full as it was with the banquets of the Italian Greeks and Syracusans, who ate to repletion twice every day, and were never without a partner for the night; and disapproval of the habits which this manner of life produces . . . It follows necessarily that the constitutions of such cities must be constantly changing, tyrannies, oligarchies and democracies succeeding one another, while those who hold the power cannot so much as endure the name of any form of government which maintains justice and equality of rights.[15]

The menu for a banquet could include small fish cooked in oil and herbs, mussels and clams, anchovies and sturgeon, fish soup, slices of tuna, roast pork with fresh bread, dried figs and sesame seed biscuits. Wine, which was stored in porous amphorae, was drunk mixed with water to disguise the vinegary taste. A famous sweet wine called Pollio was produced in Syracuse, named after the tyrant who had introduced it in the early days of the settlement.

At their meeting Plato developed some of his ideas:

At this encounter the general theme of the conversation was human virtue, and most of the discussion centred upon the topic of courage. Here Plato took the line that of all mankind the tyrant possesses the smallest share of this quality, and then turning to the subject of justice, he maintained that the life of the just is happy, while the life

of the unjust is full of misery. Dionysius would not hear out this argument, since it implied a direct reproach to himself, and he grew exasperated with the audience when he saw how much they admired the speaker and were charmed by his doctrines. At last he lost his temper and angrily demanded of Plato why he had come to Sicily. Plato replied that he had come in search of a man of virtue, whereupon Dionysius retorted: 'Indeed! Then, by the gods, you do not seem to have found one yet!'[16]

Anxious now to leave Syracuse, Plato had a passage to Athens arranged for him on a trireme. But Dionysius secretly intervened with the captain, asking him to kill Plato or at least to sell him into slavery on the journey. Plato found himself sold at Aegina, from where he was released by his friends. This may be another legend, for although this same story appears in Diodorus in a different version, Plato himself makes no mention of being sold into slavery.

During his visit to Syracuse, Plato established a friendship with Dion, then a young man of about 20. Dion was the brother of Aristomache, Dionysius' Syracusan wife, who became Plato's enthusiastic disciple, studying and practising his principles. Twenty years later Dion would be instrumental in arranging Plato's second visit.

While for most of his career Dionysius supported Sparta, towards the end of his rule he favoured Athens, which in 368 expressed her gratitude by making him and his sons honorary citizens. Then in 367, to his delight, Dionysius heard that he had won first prize for tragedy at the Festival of Athens for his play *The Ransom of Hector*. In celebration a magnificent banquet was put on in Syracuse, from which Dionysius never recovered. He developed a fever and died shortly afterwards.

# CHAPTER 4

## Five More Tyrants

The death of Dionysius I brought chaos to Syracuse and to the Greek cities of eastern Sicily, for into the power vacuum that he left behind stepped a number of adventurers and mercenaries ready to exploit the situation. The political system in Syracuse had been held together by Dionysius' powerful personality and the close control he maintained. With these gone, the system fell apart. For the next 20 years Syracuse was the scene of continual power struggles between rival leaders that had a dramatic effect upon the prosperity of the city. The immediate legacy of Dionysius I was infighting, instability and economic decline.

## Dionysius II and Dion

Dionysius II, the elder son of Dionysius and Doris, was the designated successor and at first he received full support from the Syracusans. The younger Dionysius, who was about 30 when his father died, was not well equipped to play the role of dynamic ruler. By nature he was lazy and easily led and showed none of his father's energy or determination. He was not well educated and had received no preparation for his new role from his father, who had preferred him to stay in the background. He showed little interest in governing and liked to spend time in his mother's city of Locri leaving Syracuse in the hands of his mercenaries. The courtiers made things worse by encouraging his frivolous pursuits, and control of government began to slip away, as we learn from Plutarch:

The story goes that the young man once kept a drinking party going for ninety days in succession, and that during the whole of this time no person of consequence was admitted or business discussed, while the court was given over to carousing, scurrilous humour, singing, dancing and every kind of buffoonery.[1]

A positive influence on Dionysius came from Dion, now in his 40s, a powerful figure and head of the Syracusan side of the family. Dion was married to Arete, daughter of Dionysius and Aristomache. He had carried out important diplomatic missions with Carthage for the elder Dionysius and had become very wealthy from his estates. Remaining faithful to Plato's principles, Dion was highly educated and was known for his simplicity and nobility, though as a successful military

commander he could also be haughty and arrogant. At the first meeting of the council, Dion summed up the political situation so confidently that he emerged as the most powerful man present. He offered to mediate once more with the Carthaginians, and should war become necessary, to supply 50 triremes at his own expense.

Dion decided that Dionysius' ability as a ruler would improve with training and turned to Plato to provide it. After some correspondence Plato agreed, and on his arrival in 367, was met in the harbour by royal chariot. Plato, who had been running his academy in Athens for the 20 years since his last visit, had firm ideas about education for a ruler, and as well as providing a rigorous academic programme, it was his intention to influence the nature of government in Syracuse. From Plato's letters it is clear that discussions covered topics such as the right constitution and laws for the Greek cities in Sicily, the levying of taxes and the appointment of suitable men in government. Dionysius soon found the academic studies difficult, beginning with geometry, and was impatient to move on to the principles that could help him govern the city. Plato was pleased to renew his friendship with Dion, whose personal qualities impressed him once more.

The courtiers saw Plato's arrival as a threat to their position, so to offset his influence they persuaded Dionysius to recall Philistus from exile. Philistus had served his father loyally and as Commander of the Citadel had played a central part in government. Philistus returned to Syracuse and was soon conspiring with the courtiers to undermine the positions of Plato and Dion. A letter was found from the Carthaginians which appointed Dion as their agent in Syracuse, probably part of earlier diplomatic exchanges. Dionysius showed it to Philistus and on his advice tricked Dion, according to Plutarch, by meeting him alone by the harbour, confronting him with the letter, and forcing him to board a small boat for Italy. Dionysius then brought Plato into the citadel, virtually a prisoner, to continue his teaching. At this stage war intervened and Plato returned to Athens, with Dionysius promising to recall Dion.

Dion lived well in the first years of his exile in Greece, for he was allowed to receive the substantial income from his estates. In Athens he stayed with his friend Callippus and together they attended the academy, furthering their studies in philosophy. Dion travelled widely in Greece where he was well received and was made a citizen of Sparta. In 361, however, his income was cut off by Dionysius.

In the same year, Plato was persuaded to return to Syracuse to

continue Dionysius' education and a trireme was sent to collect him. The Syracusans were delighted, especially Dion's family, taking this as a sign that the government was becoming more open. 'They all agreed in praying and hoping that Plato should prevail over Philistus and philosophy prove stronger than tyranny.'[2]

Once again it was not a meeting of minds between philosopher and tyrant. Dionysius responded to Plato's requests for Dion's recall by selling Dion's property and keeping the proceeds for himself. The teaching did not go well and Plato's position became increasingly dangerous. Finally Dionysius evicted Plato from the palace, making him stay with the mercenaries who hated Plato for trying to replace the tyranny which would remove the need for a bodyguard. When Archytas, Plato's philospher friend, heard of the danger he sent a ship to collect Plato, with messengers to demand his release. Plato's final exchange with Dionysius went like this: 'I dare say, Plato, that you will have many things to say against me to your fellow philosophers.' To which Plato answered with a smile: 'God forbid that we should have so little to talk about in the Academy that we need mention your name at all.'[3]

On his way back to Athens, Plato met Dion in the Peloponnese at the Olympic Games of August 360. Plato would have nothing more to do with the affairs of Sicily but Dion decided to act, as the rift with Dionysius was now irreparable. As well as taking away his property and income, Dionysius had forced his wife, Arete, to marry another man.

So encouraged by messages from Syracuse claiming that he had popular support against the tyrant, Dion, accompanied by his brother Megacles, and his friend Callippus, set sail for Syracuse in 357 with 1,000 men. On arrival at Syracuse he discovered that Dionysius had recently sailed for Italy, and he entered the city in triumph.

Dion entered the city by the gate which is close to the sacred enclosure and statue of Apollo Temenites, and here he ordered his trumpets to be sounded so as to quieten the shouting. Then his herald proclaimed that Dion and Megacles had come to overthrow the tyranny, and that they declared the Syracusans and the rest of the Sicilians to be free of the rule of Dionysius.[4]

Dion and his men went on to secure mainland Syracuse including Epipoli. Meanwhile Dionysius had returned to the citadel in Ortygia, and there followed a confused period of fighting and negotiation. Heraclides, a commander exiled by Dionysius, arrived in the harbour

with a small fleet of ships to support Dion. Philistus, still loyal to Dionysius and now in his 70s, returned with his fleet, was defeated and died in a sea battle. Dionysius slipped away by ship leaving his son, Apollocrates, in charge. Fierce fighting followed in Syracuse when a mercenary force sent by Dionysius attempted to retake the city. Eventually terms were agreed and Apollocrates withdrew to join his father, leaving Syracuse to Dion. His victory was short-lived. The different factions in Syracuse proved too strong and Dion's arrogance and inability to compromise counted against him. Callippus organised a coup and Dion was cornered by a group of mercenaries and killed. Callippus took control, but a year later, when campaigning in Catana he was thrown out by Hipparinus, the son of the elder Dionysius. Callippus was killed shortly afterwards in Rhegium by the same short, Spartan-style sword that had been used to kill Dion.

Plato's involvement with Sicily ended with the letters he wrote to the friends and relatives of Dion after his murder. In them he relives his experience in Sicily and his attempts to persuade Dionysius to introduce better government which had all been a disaster. As he wrote himself: 'I was disgusted with my misguided journeyings to Sicily and my ill-fortune there.'[5]

He had failed completely with Dionysius, while his protégé Dion had been murdered on the orders of Callippus, who had attended Plato's academy in Athens. Plato clearly misunderstood the nature of the men he was dealing with and their motives. The concepts developed in the academy and the lethal power struggles in Syracuse were worlds apart, and the gulf between theory and practice in politics could not have been more clearly demonstrated.

The destruction to the cities of eastern Sicily in this period was huge for the fighting had extended well beyond Syracuse. Many parts of the island were ravaged and depopulated, and some quarters of Syracuse left derelict. Much of the damage was self-defeating, as when Dionysius' mercenaries set fire to Achradina in mainland Syracuse, it was done for short-term advantage between warring factions.

Syracuse reached crisis point with the return of Dionysius in 346. In the precarious state of the city, with mercenary bands holding the real power, he succeeded in reinstating himself as ruler. Opposition to his return rallied around Hicetas, ruler of nearby Leontini. Meanwhile the Carthaginian fleet was back in Sicilian waters, waiting for the right moment to strike. A delegation was sent to the Peloponnese and Corinth, whose links with Syracuse went back to her foundation,

agreed to help. A general was appointed with the brief to go to Syracuse, remove the tyrant and protect the city from invaders. His name was Timoleon and he turned out to be an inspired choice.

## Timoleon: liberator and statesman

Timoleon was a ruler who used his power constructively, believing that he had a duty to improve conditions for the ordinary citizen. He was, in fact, close to what Plato had hoped for in a ruler, and what Dion might have been, had he remained in power. For Syracuse, his role was one of liberator and statesman.

From Plutarch's *Life* we learn that Timoleon came from a noble family in Corinth, and that he was a patriot who hated tyrants. In his early career he served in the army and he became an able military commander who inspired respect and loyalty rather than fear in his troops. He had a brother, Timophanes, who was a totally different character, grasping and self-seeking. When a young man, Timoleon had risked his own life to save his brother in battle. Later, Timophanes took control of Corinth by trickery and set himself up as tyrant. Rather than allow his home city to submit to tyranny, having tried all kinds of entreaty, Timoleon killed his brother (or had him killed) for which Corinth was grateful. After this incident Timoleon retired from public life for 20 years until called upon to go to Syracuse.

Head of Zeus, bronze coin c. 340 BC.

Now in his 60s, Timoleon sailed for Sicily in 344 with a small force of ten ships and 1,000 men. It was all Corinth could afford for she too was experiencing economic difficulties in the general disintegration of the Greek world. Before he sailed, news reached Corinth that Hicetas had sided with the Carthaginians to throw out Dionysius and divide Sicily between them. Avoiding the Cathaginian blockade, Timoleon landed at Tauromenum (Taormina), and outside the small city of Adranum, inflicted a heavy defeat upon Hicetas. This was a major success, for Hicetas' force numbered 5,000 to Timoleon's 1,200 (local troops having been added to his original force), and was achieved by a surprise attack while Hicetas's men were still setting up their camp.

When Dionysius heard of Hicetas' defeat, he sent word to Timoleon that he was prepared to leave Syracuse. A force of 400 Corinthians was sent to hold the citadel, joining Dionysius' 2,000 mercenaries, while Dionysius himself was smuggled out of the city. All the time the Carthaginians held the Great Harbour, so movement was restricted. Dionysius arrived at Timoleon's camp in civilian clothes and was put on a ship for Corinth where he became a celebrity, everyone wanting to see him and speak to him. He spent his days in the food market, drinking in the wine shops and joking with passers-by in the streets. When asked what fault he had found with Plato, and for what reason, he replied:

There were many evils inherent in absolute power but by far the greatest was the fact that of all a tyrant's so-called friends not one will speak his mind, and that it was through such people that he lost Plato's goodwill.[6]

Events were turning against Hicetas and he tried to stem the tide by having Timoleon killed. Two assassins were hired, and one was about to strike as Timoleon was making a sacrifice, when quite unexpectedly he was cut down from behind, saving Timoleon. The assassin, who had committed a previous crime, had been recognised by a member of the crowd.

This spurred Hicetas and Mago, the Carthaginian commander, to step up the pressure on Syracuse. One hundred and fifty Carthaginian ships entered the harbour and 60,000 infantry were landed and quartered in the city. The Corinthians were blockaded in the citadel on Ortygia and their position became increasingly critical as their supplies ran out. When the Carthaginians made a sortie to Catana to cut off the remaining supply line, a group of Corinthians succeeded in capturing Achradina, the large quarter of the city on the mainland.

During a lull in the fighting, Greek mercenaries working for the Carthaginians met the Syracusan Greeks while fishing for eels in the rivers running into the harbour. Talking together they became friendly, which led the Syracusans to ask: 'You are Greeks like us. Can it be that you really want to hand over a great city such as this with all its riches and amenities to the barbarians?'[7]

When Mago heard of dissatisfaction within his own ranks he decided to give up the siege. Despite the strength of his position, he withdrew his troops and his fleet from Syracuse and sailed for Carthage. As Hicetas tenaciously continued the battle, Timoleon organised a three-pronged attack, at the River Anapo, in Achradina and at the Epipoli. The attack was successful and the Corinthians won a notable victory.

Timoleon then showed his statesmanship, for his first move after clearing Syracuse of the enemy was to demolish the citadel, the tyrant's symbol, inviting citizens who wanted to take part to come with crowbars to help remove the symbol of tyranny.

Thereupon the whole population went up to the fortress, and taking that day and its proclamation to mark a truly secure foundation for their freedom, they overthrew and demolished not only the citadel but also the palaces and tombs of the tyrants. Timoleon immediately had the site levelled and built the courts of justice over it, thus delighting the Syracusans by displaying the supremacy of the rule of the people over tyranny.[8]

Once this was done, Timoleon turned his attention to the pressing need to repopulate the city, for events of recent years had left parts of Syracuse deserted.

Many of the Syracusans had perished in the various wars and uprisings, while others had escaped from the rule of the tyrants into exile. The population had declined so rapidly that the market-place of Syracuse had become thickly overgrown, and horses were pastured in the midst of it, while their grooms stretched out beside them on the grass.[9]

Corinth was asked to help find settlers, and the communities of Syracusan exiles and other Sicilian Greeks who had moved to the islands, to Asia Minor and Italy were contacted with the offer of a safe passage to Syracuse. Before long, some 60,000 immigrants had arrived to be settled in Syracuse, for whom Timoleon arranged houses, the assembly meeting to approve laws to accommodate this influx of people. It is said that, at the same time, the people voted to remove all

the tyrants' statues except that of Gelon, who was remembered for his victory over the Carthaginians at Himera in 480.

News now came from western Sicily that the Carthaginians had landed at Lilybaeum with a large force, some 70,000 men supported by artillery, together with 200 warships. Mago's failure to pursue the war successfully had been received with fury in Carthage, Mago had committed suicide and a new army had been equipped to return to Sicily. In the meantime the Corinthians had plundered parts of western Sicily further enraging the Carthaginians who were now determined to drive the Greeks out of Sicily.

To meet this threat, Timoleon had only limited resources, around 5,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry. He determined to meet the enemy in their own territory, and in a series of forced marches reached the river Crimisus, about 50 kilometres from Lilybaeum, in a few days. Here the Syracusans saw the Carthaginians drawn up before them as they started to cross the river with their four-horse chariots and the elite Sacred Band formation carrying large white shields, followed by the mass of infantry. Timoleon saw an opportunity to strike first, as the Carthaginian advance was being slowed down by the river crossing. No sooner had the battle commenced than a great storm broke bringing gusts of wind, rain and hail and causing the river to overflow its banks. These conditions suited the Syracusans in their lighter equipment, while the Carthaginians in heavy armour and their chariots got stuck in the mud and were unable to move freely. The battle swung in favour of the Syracusans:

At last as the storm still beat upon them and the Greeks had broken their front line of four hundred men, the main body turned and fled. Many were overtaken in the plain and cut down as they ran, many were caught by the river and swept away as they became entangled with those who were trying to cross, but most of the slaughter was done by the Greek light armed troops who intercepted the fugitives and dispatched them as they made for the hills.[10]

It was an historic victory for the Sicilian Greeks, for this time the Carthaginians had brought a core of their own citizens rather than relying upon mercenaries and other nationalities. As many as 3,000 Carthaginians died on the battlefield, more than had ever fallen in a single engagement before. Total losses in the Carthaginian army exceeded 12,000, including the entire Sacred Band. The Syracusans went on to capture the Carthaginian camp and the booty in total was immense, including 200 chariots and vast quantities of finely worked

breastplates, shields and weapons of all sorts. A selection was made by Timoleon to be sent to Corinth, together with his dispatches.

The Carthaginians continued to make trouble, sending their general Gisco to eastern Sicily with a force of mercenaries to ally themselves with the Greek tyrants in Messana, Catana and Leontini. These tyrants had been in control since before the arrival of Timoleon and were hated by their people. Hicetas was still the ruler of Leontini, left in charge by Timoleon as he had promised to support Syracuse. These tyrants joined forces with the Carthaginians, and together they had some initial success against the Syracusans but were later routed. The tyrants, including Hicetas, were arrested and executed. Carthage sued for peace, and according to the terms agreed, Carthaginian territory in Sicily was limited to west of the river Halycus, as in the time of Dionysius I.

Timoleon spent his remaining years on his Syracusan estate accompanied by his wife and children who had joined him from Corinth. He was hugely respected, and even after he went blind his presence was expected at meetings of the assembly, which took place in the theatre. Law and order was restored to Syracuse with the help of a commission from Corinth that re-established the Laws of Diocles, dating back to the period immediately after the Athenian War. The long-standing tug-of-war between the council, representing the ruling clique, and the assembly, representing the people, went in favour of the council, which became the centre of power. The assembly still had a role to play in administration but the council now took the decisions. For the time being, Syracuse became an oligarchy in the Corinthian model. The Greek cities, which remained independent within a loose federation ruled by Syracuse, were given help to rebuild. The economy of Syracuse and eastern Sicily picked up, helped by an increase in grain exports and the introduction of new coinage. Urban growth and prosperity returned together with a renewal in public building. When Timoleon died in 337 he was given a magnificent funeral at which the following was read:

The people of Syracuse have decreed the burial of Timoleon the Corinthian, son of Timodemus, at public cost of two hundred minas. They resolve to honour his memory for all time to come with annual contests of music, horse-racing and gymnastics, because he overthrew the tyrants, subdued the barbarians, repopulated the largest of the devastated cities, and then restored their laws to the people of Sicily.[11]

## Agathocles: return of the warlord

Alexander the Great was beginning his campaigns in this period. Before he set out with his army for India, he founded the city of Alexandria in Egypt, which within 100 years would become one of the most important in the Mediterranean. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, became the ruler of Egypt. Power was shifting away from the old Greek city states towards the new monarchies in the east and towards Rome, in the west.

In Syracuse, Timoleon's constitution and rule of law rapidly came under threat from class war and different factions seeking power. In 317, a mercenary general named Agathocles seized control of the city in a ruthless coup in which 4,000 wealthy citizens were killed and 6,000 more were exiled. This was achieved in a two-day uprising in which Agathocles had the support of the masses. After the massacre of the leading citizens, he called the assembly and taking off his military uniform, claimed to be just an ordinary citizen. The assembly, members of which were implicated in the coup, hurriedly confirmed his position as general.

Agathocles was the son of a potter who moved to Syracuse from Thermae in about 343 during the rule of Timoleon. He learned his father's trade, but then joined the army and probably took part in the fighting that broke out following the death of Timoleon. Having won the favour of a wealthy citizen, Damas, he married his widow but was sent into exile for plotting a coup against the government. The next 20 years were spent as a mercenary soldier in Sicily and southern Italy.

Once in control of Syracuse, as General with Supreme Power, Agathocles softened his approach. The wealthy elite, who had long ruled the city with or without a tyrant's presence, had been swept aside. In their place, Agathocles favoured the mass of the poor, whose support had enabled him to take over. The killings ceased and promises were made to cancel debts and to redistribute land. While capable of acts of sudden violence, he normally adopted a jovial manner and was at his ease with the common people. Once established in power, he no longer needed a bodyguard.

Agathocles' aim was to rule Sicily and he faced two immediate challenges. His policies in favour of the masses and against the ruling elite brought him into direct conflict with the Greek cities such as Akragas, which continued to be ruled by their wealthy classes. The next ten years saw a drawn out struggle for Agathocles to impose his

rule on these cities. At the same time Carthage was once again active in Sicily, aiming to maintain her position in the west of the island, and to interfere in the east to prevent the Greeks from becoming too powerful. Carthage found allies among the Greek cities due to their fear of Agathocles.

Silver coin, c. 315 BC, showing Pegasus and triskeles, the three-legged symbol of Sicily.

With the backing of the Greek cities, Carthage attacked Syracuse in 311 and put her under siege. Agathocles, in a surprise move which no one had done before, set out for Africa to attack Carthage in her homeland. Leaving his brother Antander in charge, he sailed with 14,000 men and 60 ships and, initially meeting little resistance, established himself in Tunis. Meanwhile at Syracuse Antander was successful against the Carthaginians, defeating them heavily. Hamilcar, the Carthaginian general, was captured and executed. Carthage, however, proved too well defended and Agathocles returned to Sicily after being defeated. His sons were both killed in Africa. On the campaign, honours were roughly even, so a new peace treaty was agreed leaving Agathocles in charge of Sicily to the east of the river Halycus, the traditional dividing line. This limited the Carthaginians' territory to the western corner of the island. Agathocles rapidly consolidated his position by conquering the Greek cities, taking his revenge in a brutal campaign for their support of Carthage. Segesta, in particular, was particularly cruelly treated.

In 304 Agathocles assumed the title of king (*basileus*) which began to appear on the coins of Syracuse together with his name. Also to appear for the first time was the three-legged symbol of Sicily, the triskeles, demonstrating that he ruled the whole island. This was a break with the past, as previously the name of the city had appeared, not that of the tyrant. The influence of the new monarchies like Egypt can be detected behind these changes.

Agathocles refortified Ortygia as the base for himself, his family and his mercenaries. He built up the navy, added to the fortifications around the Little Harbour by building towers at the entrance. He also added to the defences of the Euryalus Castle. Dynastic links were established with the new monarchies as he took Theoxena, step-daughter of Ptolemy of Egypt, to be his second wife and married his daughter, Lamassa, to Pyrrhus of Epirus. Lamassa's dowry was Corcyra (Corfu), which Agathocles had recently captured. Agathocles' reputation was so strong abroad that Scipio, the Roman conqueror of Carthage, would later rate him among the most effective rulers of his day.

He was preparing for another attack on Carthage when he fell ill, probably poisoned by his grandson Archagathos in a dispute over the succession. Before he died he called an assembly, and crying out for revenge, handed government back to the people. He sent off his wife and young children to the care of Ptolemy in Egypt. According to Diodorus, Agathocles was not yet dead when they put his body on the funeral pyre. He was 72 and had ruled for 28 years.

Agathocles had committed numerous and most varied acts of slaughter during his reign, and since to his cruelty towards his own people he added impiety towards the gods, the manner of his death was appropriate to his lawless life.[12]

## Pyrrhus: the military commander

In the absence of a strong ruler, the chronic instability of the region reasserted itself and the following years brought more feuding in Syracuse and fighting in eastern Sicily. Hicetas, a Syracusan general (not to be confused with the tyrant of Leontini, of the same name, in Timoleon's time) took control of the city and ruled for nine years. He pursued wars with Akragas, Segesta and the Carthaginians and was succeeded by the joint leadership of Thoenon and Sostratus. At the same time, mercenaries who had been employed by Agathocles in

Syracuse were in revolt and were persuaded to leave the city. Instead of returning to the mainland from where they had come, they settled in Messana. Known as the Mamertines, a name meaning children of Mars, they began to prey on local communities and to demand payments of tribute. Growing in strength, they carried out raids down the coast as far as Gela. By 280 the Carthaginians had renewed their interest in eastern Sicily and were attacking Syracuse once more.

At the time Pyrrhus, the Greek military commander who had married Agathocles' daughter, was campaigning against the Romans in southern Italy. Under the leadership of Thoenon and Sostratus a delegation was sent, offering him control of Syracuse, Akragas and Leontini. In return he was to expel the Carthaginians and free the island from the bands of brigands. Before leaving for Italy, Pyrrhus had already considered the possibility of Sicily:

After Italy, Sicily, of course. The place positively beckons us. It is rich, well-populated and easy to capture. Now that Agathocles is dead, the whole island is torn by factions, there is no stable government in the cities, and the demagogues have it all their own way.[13]

Pyrrhus was a hugely ambitious commander who had lost control of his native Epirus in northern Greece. In the aftermath of Alexander the Great's campaigns, men like Pyrrhus who had risen under Alexander were determined to leave their mark on the world and to win themselves a territory, as Ptolemy had done in Egypt. Hence the campaign in Italy. It is from here that the term Pyrrhic victory originated, after the battle of Asculum, which Pyrrhus won at high cost. On being congratulated, he replied: 'One more victory like that over the Romans will destroy us completely.'[14]

Pyrrhus accepted the offer and crossed to Sicily in 278 with an expedition of 30,000 infantry, 2,500 cavalry and 200 ships, and within two years had routed the Carthaginians, taking their hilltop city, Eryx. The Carthaginian base at Lilybaeum, however, proved too strong to be captured. He went on to defeat the Mamertines, destroying some of their strongholds. Military success was accompanied, however, by political failure, and just when the Sicilians should have been welcoming Pyrrhus as their ruler, they turned violently against him. The decisive point seems to have been when Thoenon, one of the Syracusan leaders, was accused of plotting against Pyrrhus and executed. From then on, Pyrrhus was faced on all sides with insurrections against his authority and a strongly united opposition.

So having failed to master Sicily, which he compared to a storm-tossed ship, Pyrrhus returned to Italy in 276. While he was considered by some to be one of the greatest military commanders of his time, six years' campaigning in Italy and Sicily came to nothing, and after three more years fighting in Greece, Pyrrhus was killed in Argos. His final comment on the situation in Sicily was: 'My friends, what a wrestling ground we are leaving behind us for the Romans and the Carthaginians.'[15]

# CHAPTER 5

## Hiero II and the Roman Siege

One of Pyrrhus's men, who had distinguished himself in the Sicilian campaign, was welcomed by Syracuse as military commander the following year. His name was Hiero, a Syracusan in his 30s, who claimed descent from the Deinomenid Dynasty, of which Gelon and Hiero I had been the most prominent members 200 years earlier. His first task was to deal with the Mamertines, who continued to carry out raids down the coast into Syracusan territory. Once he had reorganised the army, he won a major victory over them in 269 but failed to take their base at Messana. After the victory, Hiero was appointed *Strategos Autokrator* by the Syracusans. He strengthened his position through a dynastic marriage to one of Syracuse's leading families, his wife Philistis being the daughter of Leptines, a descendant of the family of the elder Dionysius. He assumed the title of king (*basileus*), in the style of the new monarchies, and portraits of Hiero, Philistis and their son, Gelon, appear separately on coins of the period with their names and titles. As Hiero II, he would rule Syracuse until he died at 92 in 216, presiding over a period of brilliant prosperity.

It seems that Hiero was universally popular, according to Polybius:

For Hiero in the first place acquired the sovereignty of Syracuse and her allies by his own merit, having found ready provided for him by fortune neither wealth, fame, nor anything else. And, what is more, he made himself king of Syracuse unaided, without killing, exiling, or injuring a single citizen, which indeed is the most remarkable thing of all; and not only did he acquire his sovereignty so, but maintained it in the same manner. For during a reign of fifty-four years he kept his country at peace and his own power undisturbed by plots, and he kept clear of that envy which is wont to wait on superiority. Actually on several occasions when he wished to lay down his authority, he was prevented from doing so by the common action of the citizens. And having conferred great benefits on the Greeks, and studied to win their high opinion, he left behind him a great personal reputation and a legacy of universal goodwill to the Syracusans.[1]

The situation in Sicily was changing rapidly with the increased interest of Rome in the island, and as Pyrrhus had foreseen, Sicily

became the battleground for Rome and Carthage. Initially Hiero supported Carthage, but after an early defeat he signed a treaty with Rome in 263. This alliance shielded Syracuse from the impact of the First Punic War, which had broken out the year before between the two major powers. When the Mamertines appealed to Rome for help against the Carthaginians, the Romans invaded, to gain control of the straits between Sicily and the mainland. Carthage was determined to keep her bases in western Sicily and responded by building up her military presence in the cities she controlled. For the next 20 years bitter fighting raged to and fro, bringing huge damage to the island. Akragas, Kamarina, Panormus, Messana and Selinus were all taken and sacked by the Romans with much of their populations sold into slavery. Lilybaeum, the Carthaginian stronghold on the west coast, held out for ten years, but finally capitulated in 241. At this stage an indemnity was paid to Rome and Carthage agreed to abandon Sicily altogether. Rome now controlled the whole of Sicily, with the exception of Syracuse.

Hiero had proved his loyalty to Rome during the war by abandoning independent military exploits and by providing major support for the Roman war effort. Syracuse became a Roman naval base and her ships fought alongside the Roman fleet, while the Roman army was supplied with troops, military equipment and grain. When peace came, Hiero was rewarded by a new treaty guaranteeing his protection and recognising him as ruler of Syracuse and much of eastern Sicily, including the cities of Akrai, Leontini, Megara Hyblaea, Helorus, Neaiton (Noto) and Tauromenion. With the backing of the Romans and the Carthaginians out of Sicily, Hiero was able to turn his attention to the economy and the civic life of Syracuse.

Hiero II with headband. Reverse shows a horseman with spear,

inscription *IERONOS*. Bronze coin c. 250 BC.

## The golden age of Syracuse

Syracuse reached the highest point of her civilisation in this period, becoming one of the most famous cities in the ancient world. As well as dealing with Athens and Rome, a regular traffic was established with Alexandria, which had developed into an important centre in the eastern Mediterranean. As a sizeable Syracusan community built up in Alexandria, the connection became closer, not only for trade, but also in the arts and sciences. Hiero developed good relations abroad, while encouraging trade and supporting the arts at home.

Syracuse was known as the city of five towns, or *Pentapolis*, being made up of five separate, interconnecting districts: Ortygia, Achradina, Neapolis, Tyche and Epipoli. The whole city was enclosed by walls, 27 kilometres in length, with imposing, well-guarded gates at strategic points.

The strength of Syracuse lies in the fact that the wall extends in a circle along a chain of hills with overhanging brows, which are, except in a limited number of places, by no means easy of approach even with no one to hinder it.[2]

The Hexaplon Gate (so-called for its six entrances) controlled the road north to Megara Hyblaea and Catana. The Achradina Gate, in front of the Great Harbour and near the marketplace, led to the road that forked south along the coast to Helorus and west to Akrai and the interior of Sicily. The Epipoli Gate lay below the Euryalus Castle, in the eastern wall. The centre of power remained Ortygia, where the treasury and law courts were situated. The army had its base in Ortygia, which was also known as the Island, or *Nassos* in the local Greek dialect. Close by was the naval base in the Little Harbour (*Lakkios*, Greek for basin). Access from Ortygia to the mainland, and the large residential district of Achradina, was through the Pentaplon Gate (with five entrances) and then over the isthmus, which held the docks and Hiero's palace. There was another gate into Ortygia from the sea, situated above the Arethusa Fountain, protected by a tower.

There is no indication from the ancient writers as to the population of the city in this period, but it was presumably greater than at the time of the Athenian Expedition, when it was thought to be 300,000, for the city and surrounding area. A total of 500,000 is possible.

Peaceful conditions encouraged agricultural production, and large

quantities of grain were produced and shipped abroad, with huge granaries built at different points in Syracuse for safe storage. Food had played a big part in Sicily since the early days of the Greek cities, both locally and for export, due to the abundance and high quality of the produce. The cooks of Sicily developed their art with a skill that was renowned throughout the ancient world and Syracuse became the gastronomic capital of the Mediterranean.

Archestratos, who came from Gela, wrote a poem around 350, *Life of Luxury*, in which he offered advice on finding the best food in the Mediterranean. He recommended:

A slice of Sicilian tuna, cut at a time when it should be salted in jars . . . A mackerel three days out of the water, before it enters the pickle . . . and Syracusan herrings, eels from Messina, barley bread from Lesbos and the wheat loaf from Athens.[3]

Archestratos was an advocate of simple, fresh food and of letting the natural flavours of good ingredients come through in dishes such as roast or boiled fish with aromatic herbs, anticipating a key aspect of Italian cooking. He did not approve, for example, of the Sicilian practice of mixing cheese with fish. He was a stickler for detail and was not always taken seriously, one commentator in *Sophists at Dinner* referring to him as: 'Archestratos, who made a voyage around the world to satisfy his stomach and appetites even lower . . . .'[4]

For the poor, the army and the slaves in Syracuse, the staple diet was a kind of porridge, to which vegetables could be added, made by boiling down the wheat. This also became the diet of the poor in Rome, with Sicily the main source of supply.

A new law was introduced by Hiero, the *Lex Hieronica*, whereby producers were to pay the state 10 per cent of their production. This law extended to the other cities under his rule, which otherwise retained their autonomy for internal affairs. In return, Syracuse took responsibility for the defence of these cities.

It was a time of brilliant cultural activity, and the city was enriched with new buildings, statuary and paintings. The theatre, which flourished in this period, was substantially redesigned and rebuilt. Inscriptions in the auditorium still show the names to whom various sections were dedicated, including the king and queen and their son, Gelon. Above the theatre a long covered terrace was added to shelter spectators in bad weather. Close to the theatre, in the Neapolis quarter, a huge altar was built, the Altar of Zeus the Liberator, intended for an annual sacrifice to celebrate Syracuse being freed from

the tyranny of Thrasybulus in 466. The city was famous for its sculpture and painting and attracted the best artists and craftsmen. Cicero described a series of paintings that decorated the walls of the Temple of Athena in Ortygia:

The inner walls of the temple were covered with a set of pictures representing a cavalry engagement of King Agathocles; these paintings were especially famous, and nothing at Syracuse was considered better worth going to see.[5]

Statues, in marble and bronze, of the gods and famous people decorated public buildings and squares; among them was the poet Sappho, who may have lived in Syracuse around 600 BC, when exiled from her home in Greece.

Hiero encouraged writers and scientists, among them the poet Theocritus, a Syracusan by birth, who wrote a series of idylls, or pictures of Sicilian country life. He is considered to be the originator of the pastoral style of poetry, praising the virtues of simple country living. After a period at the court of Hiero in Syracuse, Theocritus spent time on the island of Cos and then in Alexandria, where the city dwellers were much taken with his poetry. In an idyll written soon after Hiero's arrival in Syracuse, he praises Hiero's military abilities, adding a plea for the return of peace:

May the old inhabitants repossess their cities,

Build on ruins and restore what has been spoiled.

May the fields be worked and bring forth crops once more

While bleating flocks, too many to count, grow fat

On the grassy plains. May the passer-by at nightfall

Quicken his steps as the cattle are driven home.

Let fallows be ploughed for sowing while the cicada,

The shepherd's sentinel, high among branches, rasps

The midday silence. Let the armoury be shrouded

In cobwebs, the war-cry become a forgotten sound.[6]

As part of Hiero's patronage of the theatre, a bronze statue was made of the philosopher and playwright Epicarmus, a writer of comedies who worked in Syracuse around 480, in the time of Gelon and Hiero I. Theocritus celebrated the statue as follows:

The voice is Dorian; the man, Comedy's father,

Epicarmus, Dorian too.

Dwellers in Syracuse, the prodigious city,

Bacchus, have set up for you

This bronze image, their fellow-citizen's likeness:

Cast features stand for the true.

It is right that men who took his precepts to heart

As boys, should honour the debt.

He spoke to their questions: how to live, what to do;

Their thanks are due to him yet.[7]

The reference to the *Dorian voice* was important to Syracuse, for the city spoke Dorian, a dialect of Greek reflecting her ancestry from Corinth, in the Peloponnese, the home of Dorian culture. Theocritus himself also wrote in the Dorian dialect.

As a patron, Hiero's most famous protégé was Archimedes, another Syracusan, a friend and relative of Hiero's. Mathematician, astronomer, civil and military engineer, and architect, Archimedes was a man of astonishing learning and versatility. He had the ability to present simple, logical solutions to complex problems and earned enormous respect for his work.

Certainly in the whole science of geometry it is impossible to find more difficult and intricate problems handled in simpler and purer terms than in his works . . . The fact is that no amount of mental effort of his own would enable a man to hit upon the proof of one of Archimedes's theorems, and yet as soon as it is explained to him, he feels that he might have discovered it himself, so smooth and rapid is the path by which he leads us to the required conclusion.[8]

His work was outstanding for its originality, for he was no mere compiler of current knowledge, but was always trying to make new discoveries.

As a young man Archimedes studied in Alexandria, which had become a centre of learning under the Ptolemies. Joining the Syracusans established there, he made friends with Conon of Samos, a mathematician whose work he rated highly and with whom he would maintain a correspondence. In Alexandria, Archimedes first showed his genius for practical invention, making his screw, a spiral watertight tube that when turned raised water up the tube. Applied in irrigation, it proved to be one of the most useful hydraulic inventions of ancient times.

When back in Syracuse, Hiero presented him with a practical

problem. He had ordered a crown in pure gold and suspected that silver had been partly used instead. According to Syracusan legend, Archimedes solved it in his bath, suddenly realising that the volume of an object can be measured by how much water it displaces. Gold and silver would displace different volumes of water, and he could thus test how the crown was made. There then took place one of the best known incidents in history, for when he made this discovery, Archimedes is supposed to have leapt from his bath, and running naked through the streets, shouted Eureka! (I've found it!).

Later, in discussion with Hiero, Archimedes outlined his principle of leverage, asserting that by applying the right force he could move any weight.

Hiero was amazed, and invited him to put his theorem into practice and show him some weight moved by a tiny force. Archimedes chose for his demonstration a three-masted merchantman of the royal fleet, which had been hauled ashore with immense labour by a large gang of men, and he proceeded to have the ship loaded with her usual freight and embarked a large number of passengers. He then seated himself at some distance away and without using any noticeable force, but merely exerting traction with his hand through a complex system of pulleys, he drew the vessel towards him with as smooth and even a motion as if she were gliding through the water. The king was deeply impressed, and recognising the potentialities of his skill, he persuaded Archimedes to construct for him a number of engines designed both for attack and defence, which could be employed in any kind of siege warfare.[9]

As a result, Archimedes started work on a number of inventions, and with Gelon's active involvement, brought the defences of Syracuse up to a high level of readiness.

The merchant navy, which had always been important to Syracuse, was expanded in this period to handle the increasing overseas trade. Warships were also needed to protect the merchant fleet from the permanent threat of piracy. The shipyards of Syracuse had been busy in the days of Agathocles and Pyrrhus in providing the fleet to combat the Carthaginians, and their skill and use of technology in shipbuilding was second to none. Ships with four or five banks of oars had become the norm, while some went even bigger to seven or eight. The largest fleet of the day was Ptolemy II's in Alexandria, where the ships went up to 30 banks of oars, though the majority were with seven and nine banks.

A remarkable new ship, the *Syrakosia*, was commissioned by Hiero to be built in Syracuse. Designed to carry freight, she was the largest merchantman in antiquity, and carried 20 banks of oars. Luxuriously fitted and heavily armed, she was built by Archias of Corinth, under the supervision of Archimedes. A description of the *Syrakosia* was recorded by Athenaeus:

But Hiero, the King of Syracuse, he who was in all respects friendly to Rome, not only interested himself in building of temples and gymnasia, but was also a zealous ship builder, constructing grain-transports, the construction of one of which I will proceed to describe.

For material he caused timber to be brought from Aetna, enough in quantity for the building of sixty quadriremes. In keeping with this, he caused to be prepared dowels, belly-timbers, stanchions, and all the material for general uses, partly from Italy, partly from Sicily; for cables hemp from Iberia, hemp and pitch from the river Rhone, and all other things needed from many places.[10]

Hiero took a close personal interest, and within six months the ship was ready to be floated for the next stage of construction. The *Syrakosia*, which had three masts, was fitted with every kind of luxury, from a large apartment furnished with paintings and statues, to a bathroom with a marble wash-stand, and on the upper deck, a gymnasium. Armaments, designed by Archimedes, included cranes attached to the masts capable of hurling missiles; turrets jutting out over the water from which stones could be dropped on enemy ships; and a catapult that could throw weights of 75 kilogrammes. The cargo was largely grain, jars of Sicilian salt fish and wool. The crew numbers have been lost but included 600 men in reserve in case they were needed. When she was ready to sail, Hiero began to get reports that very few harbours were big or deep enough to receive her. So as grain was short in Egypt, he sent her to Ptolemy as a present and her name was changed to *The Alexandris*.

Towards the end of Hiero's rule, war broke out once more between Carthage and Rome. The Second Punic War, which lasted from 218 to 201, presented Rome with the greatest danger she had yet faced. The Carthaginians were determined to avenge their defeats, and with the Barca family now in power (Hamilcar, his son-in-law Hasdrubal, and his son Hannibal) they launched a major campaign through their territory in Spain. In 218 Hannibal made his famous crossing of the Alps with his army and his elephants to attack Rome on her home ground.

Sicily's location between the two belligerents meant she was of great strategic importance, and the Romans used the ports in the west of the island to attack Carthaginian shipping. Both the Romans and the Carthaginians sent troops to Sicily and fighting followed on the island. Hiero once again provided substantial support to Rome, including a large shipment of grain together with 1,000 lightly armed troops in 216. News then reached Sicily of a catastrophic defeat for the Romans at the battle of Cannae, where their casualties exceeded 45,000.

The pressure of war had the effect of reopening the internal battles in Syracuse. A pro-Carthaginian faction appeared with which Gelon, Hiero's son and designated successor, was associated. When Gelon died, it was generally considered 'convenient'. Hiero himself died shortly afterwards, an old man of 92, and he was succeeded by his grandson, Hieronymus, a youth of 15 with a violent streak. His guardians steered him in the pro-Carthaginian direction and he was assassinated a year later. Civil war then broke out in Syracuse between the pro-Carthaginian and the pro-Roman factions in which much of Hiero's family was killed. The brutal conduct of the Roman army in Sicily strengthened anti-Roman feeling, so that when Hannibal sent two emissaries to Syracuse, Epicydes and Hippocrates, they were able to take control of the city for Carthage. Other cities in Sicily joined the Carthaginian side and Rome had no option but to invade and sent one of her best generals, Marcellus, to take Syracuse.

## The Roman siege of Syracuse

Marcellus was a highly professional soldier who had come up the hard way, specialising as a young man in single combat, with a string of victories to his name. Before a battle against the Gauls at Mediolanum (Milan) Marcellus was challenged by their king whom he killed on horseback with his lance in front of both armies. The Romans went on to win a notable victory. Marcellus was subsequently known as the sword of Rome, and Hannibal said of him, in comparison to another Roman general famous for his delaying tactics: 'That he feared Fabius as a schoolmaster and Marcellus as an opponent.'[11] At the time of the siege, Marcellus was a seasoned commander in his mid-50s.

Marcellus had recruited a number of troops who were survivors of the battle of Cannae. They had been disowned by the Roman Senate after the disastrous defeat and sent to Sicily, forbidden to return to Italy as long as the war with Hannibal lasted. The fighting in Sicily

offered them a chance to rejoin the army and they were anxious to prove themselves in action. When the Romans arrived at Syracuse they made camp near the Olympieion, by the Great Harbour. The navy was under the command of Marcellus and the land forces under Appius Claudius, and together they launched a simultaneous attack against the Achradina wall in the Great Harbour and the Hexaplon Gate to the north. The Romans were confident of making a rapid breakthrough into the city.

In the harbour 60 *quinqueremes*, the large fighting ships with five banks of oars, each full of men armed with bows, slings and javelins, attacked Achradina where the wall reached down to the sea. Eight ships had been lashed together to transport an enormous siege engine with a tower which could be raised to attack the defenders on the wall.

But Archimedes, who had prepared engines constructed to carry to any distance, so damaged the assailants at long range, as they sailed up, with his more powerful mangonels (catapults) and heavier missiles as to throw them into much difficulty and distress; and as soon as these engines shot too high he continued using smaller and smaller ones as the range became shorter, and, finally, so thoroughly shook their courage that he put a complete stop to their advance.[12]

When the ships got close in shore, other perils faced them:

He had pierced in the wall at short distances a series of loopholes of the height of a man and of about a palm's breadth on the outer side. Stationing archers and small scorpions (another kind of engine for firing missiles) opposite these inside the wall and shooting through them, he disabled the soldiers.[13]

Plutarch describes other weapons designed by Archimedes:

At the same time huge beams were run out from the walls so as to project over the Roman ships: some of them were sunk by great weights dropped from above, while others were seized at the bows by iron claws or by beaks like those of cranes, hauled into the air by means of counterweights until they stood upright on their sterns, and then allowed to plunge to the bottom, or else they were spun round by means of windlasses situated inside the city and dashed against the steep cliffs and rocks which jutted out under the walls, with great loss of life to the crews.

As for the enormous siege-engine which Marcellus brought up, mounted on eight galleys as I have described, and known as a

sambuca because of its resemblance to a musical instrument of the same name, a stone weighing a hundred pounds was discharged while it was approaching the city wall, immediately followed by a second and a third. These descended on their target with a thunderous crash and a great surge of water shattered the platform on which the machine was mounted, loosened the bolts which held it together, and dislodged the whole framework from the hulks which supported it.[14]

According to legend, Archimedes is also supposed to have built a device using mirrors to reflect the sun, with enough strength to set fire to the Roman ships from the city's walls. Diodorus states that: 'A fearsome fiery heat was kindled in the barges, and from the distance of an arrow's flight he reduced them to ashes.'[15]

Appius, who made his attack with the land forces on the north wall just to the east of the Hexaplon, faced similar problems:

For his men while at a distance were mowed down by the shots from the mangonels (catapults) the supply of artillery and ammunition being admirable both as regards quantity and force, as indeed was to be expected where Hiero had furnished the means and Archimedes had designed and constructed the various contrivances. And when they did get near the wall they were so severely punished by the continuous volleys of arrows from the loopholes of which I spoke above that their advance was checked or, if they attacked under cover of mantelets (a form of screen) they were destroyed by the stones and beams dropped upon their heads.[16]

To the Roman soldiers it seemed as if they were fighting a supernatural enemy, for any initiative they took was matched by some unexpected and devastating response. When Marcellus saw how unsuccessful the attack had been, and how low his troops' morale had fallen, he called off the attack, and no more direct assaults were made. He summed up the situation as follows:

We may as well give up fighting this geometrical Briareus (a mythical giant) who uses our ships like cups to ladle water out of the sea, who has whipped our sambuca and driven it off in disgrace, and who can outdo the hundred-handed giants of mythology in hurling so many different missiles at us at once.[17]

Appius remained to blockade Syracuse, while Marcellus set off to capture the other cities that had gone over to the Carthaginians.

During negotiations with the Syracusans, Marcellus noticed that a particular stretch of the city wall, including a tower, was not well

defended. When the Syracusans were celebrating the feast day of Artemis, he sent in his troops. Livy left a detailed account:

Then, when he felt the point had come at which people who had been feasting during the day would have had enough wine and would be falling asleep, he ordered the soldiers of a single maniple (a small tactical unit) to take up the ladders, and about 1,000 armed men were led silently to the appropriate point in a narrow column. When the first men had scaled the wall noiselessly and calmly, the others followed them up in rows, for the daring of those ahead of them encouraged even the hesitant.

When the 1,000 soldiers had taken possession of a section of the wall, the rest of the troops were brought forward and they began to scale it with a greater number of ladders. They had already been given a signal from the Hexaplon, which the advance party had reached after coming through a district that was thoroughly deserted, for most of the sentries had feasted in the towers, and had either fallen asleep over their cups or were still drinking in a semi-inebriated state. A few they surprised and killed in their beds.

Near the Hexaplon is a small gate. Work had begun on smashing this with extreme force; the agreed trumpet-signal had been given from the Hexaplon; and by this point the secret operation was everywhere turning into open violence.[18]

The quarters of Tyche and Neapolis were captured by the Romans in this sortie.

When these districts had been captured, Marcellus made his entry at daybreak through the Hexaplon amid the congratulations of his officers. It is said that as he looked down from the heights upon the great and magnificent city below, he wept as he thought of its impending fate, and of how its appearance would be transformed in a few hours' time when his army had sacked it. For his troops had demanded their plunder and not one of his officers dared to resist them, indeed many of them had urged that they should set fire to the city and raze it to the ground. Marcellus refused to tolerate this suggestion, but much against his will he allowed his men to carry off property and slaves. However, he gave strict orders that they must not lay a hand on free citizens, nor kill, outrage, or enslave any Syracusan.[19]

This took place in early 212, and there followed a stalemate for several months with the Romans occupying two districts of the city, while Ortygia, Achradina and Epipoli, the three most heavily defended

districts, remained in the hands of the pro-Carthaginian Syracusans.

Meanwhile the Carthaginians had returned to Syracuse and their fleet was in the Great Harbour facing the Romans, and their army was camped by the Anapo River. As had happened so often in the past, sickness from the marshes broke out among the troops in the camp and the Carthaginians were very badly hit, losing most of their troops, including their generals. The Romans camped by the harbour were able to take refuge in those parts of Syracuse already captured.

Inside Syracuse furious arguments raged between the different factions as the blockade continued, each side looking for a way out of the impasse. Finally a Spanish mercenary named Moericus, part of the force guarding Ortygia, agreed to let the Romans in via the gate above the Arethusa Fountain. Marcellus organised an attack on Achradina, guided by Sosis, a Syracusan coppersmith who had been one of the conspirators in the assassination of Hieronymus, to coincide with entry into Ortygia. Shortly afterwards, towards the end of 212, resistance came to an end.

Livy describes the aftermath:

A quaestor was then dispatched to the Nassus with a body of soldiers to take charge of the royal treasury, and keep it under guard. The city was handed over to the common soldiers for looting, but guards were posted at the homes of those who had served with the Roman troops. There were many instances of atrocities committed from anger and from greed.[20]

In the midst of the chaos, Archimedes met his death.

Tradition has it that amidst the uproar, such as the fear reigning in a captured city might arouse, with soldiers running on the rampage everywhere, Archimedes was still concentrating intensely on some figures that he had drawn in the dust, and was killed by a soldier who did not know who he was. Marcellus, it is said, was upset by this. He made careful arrangements for his funeral, and also conducted a search for Archimedes' relatives, who then received honour and protection, thanks to the man's reputation and memory.[21]

Plutarch gives us a similar story, with different versions:

As fate would have it the philosopher was by himself, engrossed in working out some calculation by means of a diagram, and his eyes and his thoughts were so intent upon the problem that he was completely unaware that the Romans had broken through the defences, or that the city had been captured. Suddenly a soldier came upon him and

ordered him to accompany him to Marcellus. Archimedes refused to move until he had worked out his problem and established his demonstration, whereupon the soldier flew into a rage, drew his sword, and killed him. According to another account, the Roman came up with a drawn sword and threatened to kill him there and then: when Archimedes saw him, he begged him to stay his hand for a moment, so that he should not leave his theorem imperfect and without its demonstration, but the soldier paid no attention and dispatched him at once. There is yet a third story to the effect that Archimedes was on his way to Marcellus bringing some of his instruments, such as sundials and spheres and quadrants, with the help of which the dimensions of the sun could be measured by the naked eye, when some soldiers met him, and believing that he was carrying gold in the box promptly killed him.[22]

Livy concludes:

Such, by and large, was the capture of Syracuse, and the quantity of booty taken was so great that more would hardly have been forthcoming if it were Carthage that had been captured, at a time when the war was being fought on equal terms.[23]

# Epilogue

For Syracuse, capture by the Romans ended the era of independence as a Greek city state, which had lasted for over 500 years. Instead, she became part of the Roman province of Sicily, her trade and commerce redirected in the interests of Rome. Her dominion over the cities of eastern Sicily ended, and each city had to make her own accommodation with the Romans. While life would go on, the city would never regain the power, influence and prosperity that she had enjoyed in the Greek era and her population would decline dramatically.

Marcellus was awarded an ovation in Rome to celebrate his capture of Syracuse and on show in his procession were large numbers of statues, paintings and other works of art from Syracuse. In 210 he was elected to a fourth term as consul. Two years later at the age of 60 and still on active service, Marcellus found himself confronting Hannibal in southern Italy. He saw an opportunity to take an advantage for his troops by occupying a hill that stood between the Roman and the Carthaginian camps and rode out to examine the position with his son and a small force of 200 horsemen. It was a trap set by Hannibal, and as soon as the Romans rode up the hill they were set upon by Carthaginians troops, who had been in hiding. In the fight Marcellus was killed and his son, who escaped, was wounded. When Hannibal recognised the body he treated it with honour, had it burned and the ashes sent to Marcellus' son.

Archimedes' reputation has gone from strength to strength, and today he is generally considered to be the greatest mathematician of the ancient world. His mathematical work, which was not well known in his lifetime, received wider recognition when it was circulated in the sixth century AD. It became hugely influential, making Archimedes the founding father of modern mathematics, a position comparable to that of Plato in philosophy. The legend of his mirror burning the Roman ships made a big impression and many tests have been done since to see if it were possible, with largely inconclusive results. Archimedes, himself, was unimpressed with his mechanical inventions and left no record of them.

Some of his mathematical treatises have survived, as in the Middle Ages copies were made from the original papyrus sheets onto hard wearing parchment. Archimedes is currently back in the news as researchers in the USA are unravelling the contents of a recent find,

the Archimedes Palimpsest, which has been described as the blueprint of modern science. The goatskin parchment, on which seven of Archimedes' treatises were copied in the tenth century, was reused in 1229 as a prayer book. Using X-ray imaging, researchers have uncovered texts of crucial importance in understanding Archimedes' work which have not been seen before in modern times.[24]

# CHAPTER 6

## Cicero and the Rise of Rome

For the Syracusans capture of their city by Rome was a catastrophe. It was the first time that Syracuse had fallen to a foreign invader, and it came as a tremendous shock after 50 years of prosperity. Suddenly they found themselves at the mercy of the Roman army, their status as free citizens lost. Houses were not safe from the Romans and many Syracusans lost their land, leaving them with nothing to live on. Civil administration broke down, and food became so scarce that people willingly gave themselves into slavery to avoid starvation. Everything in the city was eaten, including the sacred fish in the Arethusa fountain. According to Diodorus: 'Marcellus ordered that the persons of all who were freeborn were to be spared, but that all their property was to be taken as booty.'[1]

Present at the ovation that Rome gave Marcellus to celebrate the capture of Syracuse were Moericus, the Spanish mercenary who had betrayed Ortygia, and Sosis, the Syracusan who had acted as guide for the Roman troops. Both were given Roman citizenship and land in Sicily, and Sosis was able to take his pick of houses in Syracuse. Marcellus took an enormous amount of booty with him to Rome, and it was said that the Roman love of Greek artefacts began at this time.

Along with a model of Syracuse after its capture, catapults, ballistae and a whole panoply of war engines were carried in the procession, and with them were also objets d'art amassed over a long period of peace thanks to the wealth of the Syracusan kings. There were heaps of silver and bronze artefacts, furniture, precious clothing and many famous statues, Syracuse having been one of the Greek cities most richly endowed in such things.[2]

After a couple of years conditions in Syracuse under Marcellus became so bad that some leading Syracusans went to Rome to plead their case. At the Senate hearing they maintained that Marcellus had refused to have anything to do with them, preferring to deal with Sosis and Moericus, who had become his representatives in Syracuse. In this way he had given himself a free hand to do what he liked. They went on to say that:

The people of Syracuse had been left with nothing but their city's walls and looted buildings and the gods' temples had been broken into

and robbed with the removal of the very statues of the gods and their ornaments.[3]

The Senate was sympathetic to the Syracusans, claiming that the city, an old ally, should not have been taken by force and that the enemy was not the city herself but the tyrants who had grabbed power and supported Carthage. They concluded:

If King Hiero the most loyal supporter of the power of Rome, should rise from the dead, how could anyone not feel ashamed when either Syracuse or Rome were shown to him? After looking upon the half-ruined and pillaged city that was his home, he would walk into Rome to set eyes on the spoils taken from that home in the approach to the city, practically at the city gate.[4]

The Senate then announced a decree. The actions of Marcellus in taking Syracuse were ratified, but in future the state of the city was to be the concern of the Senate and a consul, Laevinus, was appointed to look after her interests. Later in the year Laevinus landed in Sicily with his legions, his first task being to resolve the situation in Syracuse. He went on to take Agrigentum (the Roman name for Akragas) after which the remaining pro-Carthaginian cities came over to Rome. This brought fighting on the island to an end and from then on Sicily's role in the war was limited to providing a base for Roman operations. The Sicilians returned to farming the land to produce food for the island and for Rome. Sicily became Rome's first province and introduced the Romans to the benefits of controlling overseas territory.

## War with Carthage

The situation in Italy at the time was dramatic, with Rome close to breaking point. Hannibal, with his army, was roaming freely through southern Italy and in 211 was camped just outside the walls of the city. The defences were too strong, however, for a siege to be attempted. Rome's losses in these years were very great; approximately one-fifth of men of military age died, while huge numbers of prisoners were taken in the countryside. The Romans continued to play a waiting game and refused to meet Hannibal in a set-piece battle. Instead they decided to attack in Spain, where the Carthaginians had established their supply line between Carthage and Italy. The man given this responsibility was Publius Cornelius Scipio.

Scipio came from an ancient Roman family with a long tradition of

serving the state in politics and the army. His father was a military commander and his military training began when he was a boy. In his first campaign against Hannibal at the age of 17, he rescued his father during a cavalry action and saved his life. Later, both his father and uncle were killed fighting the Carthaginians in Spain, while Scipio survived the disastrous Roman defeat at Cannae. In these terrible times for Rome, Scipio made a name for himself as a brave and enthusiastic leader, and in 210 at the age of 24, he was appointed to command the army in Spain. Livy reported that no one else wanted the job, which was considered a death sentence.

The Carthaginians controlled most of Spain and had three armies stationed in the west and centre of the country. Their main base and source of supply was a port on the east coast, Carthagena. This Scipio succeeded in capturing, along with enormous quantities of equipment. He went on to defeat the Carthaginians in battle, which was decided by a Roman cavalry charge on both flanks, one led by Scipio. Then in 206, Scipio's Roman army, strengthened by his Spanish allies, met the main Carthaginian force at Ilipa (Seville). Each side fielded around 50,000 men. Scipio took the initiative, and through the use of intelligent tactics, won a decisive victory that led to the withdrawal of the Carthaginians from Spain.

Soon afterwards Scipio returned to Rome, handing over his command in Spain. He was now a celebrity, seen as the man who could finally defeat Hannibal, and in Rome people came to catch a glimpse of him wherever he went. In recognition of his success Scipio was elected consul and allocated the province of Sicily. It was clear to Scipio that the war should now be taken to Africa, to attack Carthage directly in her home territory and thus force Hannibal to leave Italy. While a popular hero, Scipio had his enemies in the Senate, his rapid rise having created jealousies among his rivals, and they ensured that he was not given permission to levy troops. Instead he was encouraged to go to Sicily to assess the situation and to evaluate the possibility of crossing over to Africa. So with 7,000 volunteers and 30 ships, Scipio left for Sicily.

Once in Sicily he set about building an army, for despite the lack of support in Rome, it was clear that his objective was the destruction of Carthage. Among the troops stationed on the island he selected the most suitable, particularly the experienced and well-trained men who had fought with Marcellus and who had taken part in the siege of Syracuse. An elite cavalry force was set up, the horses and equipment

been provided by the Sicilians. Old ships were refurbished and raiding parties sent across to Africa. Then, as Livy tells us:

Having completed his preparations for war, Scipio came to Syracuse, which was still quite unsettled after the great upheavals of the war. Some Greeks were trying to reclaim property, which had been restored to them by the Senate, from people of Italian stock who were holding on to it with the same ferocity with which they had seized it during the hostilities. Feeling his first priority was to safeguard the integrity of the state, Scipio restored the property to the Syracusans by edict, and also by passing sentences on those who persisted in their unlawful possession. Such measures met with approval not only from the plaintiffs, but also from all the communities of Sicily who, as a result, assisted the war effort all the more assiduously.[5]

In his absence, his enemies were busy in Rome and the word was spread that Scipio had gone native in Sicily, with a lifestyle unworthy of a Roman.

There were even criticisms of the commander's personal appearance – not simply unlike a Roman, but unlike a soldier. He would saunter around the gymnasium in a Greek cloak and sandals, it was said, and spend time on books and exercising – and his entire staff enjoyed as much idleness and easy living, tasting the delights of Syracuse.[6]

A delegation was sent from Rome to Syracuse to investigate. Scipio put on a full display of his army and navy, including a mock sea battle in the harbour, followed by a tour of the arsenals and equipment, to demonstrate his readiness for war. So impressed was the delegation that Scipio was given immediate permission to attack Carthage. In preparation for the invasion, Sicily became a Roman training ground with volunteers arriving from all over Italy.

The Romans gathered their forces at Lilybaeum (Marsala), the old Carthaginian base on the south-west coast of Sicily, facing Africa. Scipio was accompanied by his lieutenants from the Spanish campaign, his brother Lucius and Gaius Laelius, who now commanded the fleet. The crossing, which took place in 204, was carried out without incident and a Roman camp was established on the North African coast. An initial Roman victory led to a short-lived peace treaty, which established that Hannibal and his army should leave Italy. A Carthaginian attack on a Roman fleet set up the final confrontation.

The battle of Zama, which took place in the autumn of 202, was fought for very high stakes. As the two commanders prepared their

men, each was aware that:

They would know by the night of the following day whether Rome or Carthage would rule the world, for the prize of victory would be not Africa and not Italy, but the four corners of the earth.[7]

The risks were also very great; for Carthage risked her freedom and Rome her army, as there was no escape route. The two armies that faced each other both had some 35,000–40,000 troops, Hannibal having the advantage in numbers, but were very different in composition. While Hannibal had 80 war elephants and a number of his veterans, he had been forced to raise new troops and was without his Numidian allies, who had deserted to the Romans. Scipio had his well-trained legions, the heavy infantry, and a strong force of cavalry, including the Numidians. Scipio showed his tactical skill once more at the start of the battle. The impact of the elephant charge was countered by the Roman lines that opened to let the elephants through, while trumpeters caused the elephants to charge back into the Carthaginian lines in confusion. A cavalry action developed, with the Romans and their Numidian allies pushing the Carthaginians back, and finally chasing them from the field. The infantry fought a long, hard battle. Eventually the legions closed with the Carthaginian veterans in fierce and bloody fighting, with neither side gaining the advantage. The Roman and Numidian cavalry turned the tide of the battle when they returned victorious and charged the rear of Hannibal's army. This began a collapse in which the Carthaginians were slaughtered. By the end their army had ceased to exist. Twenty thousand of the Carthaginians and their allies died, while the Roman losses were 1,500.

The power of Carthage was finally broken at the battle of Zama. For while Scipio imposed a fair peace treaty that left Hannibal in charge, and the city free to follow her commercial interests, she lost her warships and the ability to engage in foreign wars. Having survived the crisis, Rome emerged immeasurably strengthened, her alliances stronger than ever and her empire expanded to include Spain and North Africa. Rome was now the dominant power in the Mediterranean.

Scipio's role had been decisive. At a crucial time he had rebuilt the strength of the army, providing inspired leadership. He had proved himself to be one of Rome's greatest generals, who never lost a battle, and who saw beyond the fighting to the peace. He returned to a hero's welcome in Rome, where he was granted the name Africanus for his

great victory. It turned out to be the peak of his career, for his political opponents, in particular Cato the Elder, saw to it that his involvement in state affairs would be limited. Scipio refused to fight political battles, considering them to be against the interests of the state, and would not use his military prestige for political purposes. According to Seneca, he showed exceptional self-restraint and sense of duty, saying that: 'If my stature has grown too great for her (Rome's) best interests, then out I go.'[8] After serving in Greece and Syria, together with his brother Lucius, he retired to his estate on the coast of Campania with his family and a retinue of veterans, where he died in 183 at the age of 53.

When the Romans decided to arrest Hannibal, he went into exile in the eastern Mediterranean. Here the Hellenistic kingdoms in Macedonia and Syria, which had supported Carthage, were still defying Roman authority and Hannibal joined them in their struggle. It is said that here he met Scipio, who was on a diplomatic mission for Rome, and the two commanders discussed military strategy and the great generals of the past. Hunted by the Romans, Hannibal went on fighting until he was betrayed. Then rather than face capture, he committed suicide by taking poison. He probably died in 183, the same year as Scipio, aged 64.

The prosperity of Carthage as a commercial centre continued to alarm and annoy the Romans. When Cato the Elder visited the city, he found it wealthy and full of armed men, and he never missed an opportunity to warn the Senate of his findings, ending every speech with the words: 'And furthermore it is my opinion that Carthage must be destroyed!'[9]

Eventually Rome ordered the Carthaginians to abandon their city and to move inland. As a maritime city, dependent upon sea trade, this they refused to do. In 146 a Roman army was dispatched under the command of another Scipio, the adopted grandson of Africanus, which after a siege, razed Carthage to the ground. 'Scipio, when he looked upon the city as it was utterly perishing and in the last throes of its complete destruction, is said to have shed tears and wept openly for his enemies.'[10]

Roman soldiers went from house to house killing the residents, the survivors being sold into slavery. The city and the port were demolished and destroyed by fire and the surrounding countryside spread with salt to prevent cultivation. Traces of ash are still to be seen on the site today.

The fighting in Macedonia spread to Greece where the Achaean League, a confederation of cities in the Peloponnese, attempted to keep their independence. The Roman Senate voted to make an example and singled out Corinth for destruction. This amply demonstrated Rome's ambivalent attitude to Greece, for many educated Romans were openly Hellenophile, including Scipio, and admired Greek culture. But when it came to affairs of state, the Romans ruthlessly imposed their will and Corinth suffered the same fate as Carthage, in the same year. Before being destroyed, the city was looted and as in the case of Syracuse, and the art treasures were sent to Rome. Polybius reports that in the ruins soldiers played dice on famous pictures. A hundred years later, Julius Caesar had the city rebuilt and repopulated.

In the following years Sicily was disrupted by two major slave revolts that gave the Romans a challenge until suppressed by the legions. Huge numbers of slaves were taken by the Romans in their campaigns in Greece and the Near East who were sold to buyers in Italy. Many ended up working on the large estates, the *latifundia*, set up in Sicily to increase grain production. Treatment of the slaves on these estates was brutal, and as some of them were soldiers, eventually they rebelled.

The first revolt took place near Enna in 139, led by a Syrian slave called Eunus. He built an army of around 60,000 and succeeded in defying the Romans for seven years. In 104 a second revolt took place after the Romans announced their intention to free certain slaves. A vast crowd collected in Syracuse demanding their freedom, which was mostly denied. A rebel army of 40,000 was collected, uniting slaves from eastern and western Sicily, which failed, however, to take any major city. While the fighting was widespread, the damage was not as great as in previous wars.

The most serious revolt took place on the Italian mainland in the 70s, when Spartacus and his group of gladiators put together a force of 90,000 that initially defeated several Roman armies. For a few years they represented the greatest threat to Rome since Hannibal. Spartacus had been planning to cross to Sicily when he was faced with Crassus and his legions and was finally defeated.

## Cicero in Sicily

The Roman governor of Sicily at the time of the Spartacus revolt was

Verres. His term of office was extended from the normal one year to three, as his successor was caught up in the revolt. His governorship turned out to be particularly corrupt. In his successful prosecution of Verres, Cicero made his name and went on to become one of Rome's greatest advocates. Cicero was also a statesman, who like Scipio, put Rome's interests first. He served as consul in 63 and governor of Cilicia in 51–50. His aim was always to maintain a balanced constitution for Rome, backed by an honest administration.

Cicero first came to Sicily in 75 when he was appointed *quaestor* in Lilybaeum. This was one of two such posts in Sicily, under the Roman governor, whose task it was to collect taxes and ensure the supply of grain. The Roman system, based on that of Hiero II, allocated 10 per cent of Sicily's grain production free to Rome, topped up by compulsory purchase. He was an upcoming lawyer at the time, trained in oratory in Greece, and this was his first political post. He was good at his job and impressed the Sicilians with his fair dealing.

On his return to Rome, Cicero took up his legal practice once more. In due course he was approached by some Sicilians, aware of his reputation for honesty, to act as counsel in their prosecution of Verres. As governor of Sicily, Verres' behaviour had been extreme, going way beyond the accepted level of personal enrichment to include extortion and murder. The Sicilians were desperate for a conviction. Verres, however, had the support of senior senators who closed ranks against the provincial plaintiffs. He also benefited from having the top advocate of the day, Hortensius, as his defence counsel. Cicero obtained two months to prepare his case which he spent fact-finding in Sicily. Back in Rome he found that the authorities, in trying to protect Verres, had allocated minimal time for the trial. Cicero decided upon surprise tactics and, ignoring the usual preliminaries, presented his case using witnesses and documents in a brilliantly condensed form. He clearly demonstrated that in three years Verres had amassed a huge personal fortune at the expense of the Sicilian province, illegally mistreating Roman citizens in the process. Such was the impact of his case that Hortensius gave up on the spot, leaving the courtroom. The jury returned a guilty verdict; Verres was fined and went into exile in Massilia (Marseille), taking most of his fortune with him. It was the turning point for Cicero, which established him at the top of his profession, his oratory and skill in preparing a case surpassing all his rivals.

Cicero is an important figure in the story of Syracuse, for in his

writings he left detailed descriptions of the city only 150 years after the end of the Greek era. He is our best source of information on Sicily in the late Republican period. As well as advocate and politician, he was a scholar who published letters, speeches, translations from the Greek and works of philosophy. He was a staunch Hellenophile who spoke Greek and was fascinated by Greek culture. He compared Aristotle to a river of flowing gold and thought that Plato, in his dialogues, spoke like a god. In his private life he was more vulnerable than his public persona suggested. He suffered badly from nerves before making a speech, and never physically strong, had to be careful of his health.

A man with a sense of humour, Cicero peppered his speeches with jokes. This did not endear him to his opponents, for not only did they lose their case but they were made to look ridiculous in the process. He said of his fellow advocates that they shouted to compensate for the poor quality of their speeches. On one occasion during a lawsuit, the speaker stated that he had been asked to present his case with care, eloquence and integrity. Cicero replied: 'How can you be so hardheaded as not to exhibit a single one of these qualities?'[11] Another time he was investigating the case of a young man who was accused of killing his father by giving him a poisoned cake. The young man said aggressively to Cicero that he would give him a bit of his mind. 'I would much prefer it, replied Cicero, to a bit of your cake.'[12]

The name Cicero was in itself open to ridicule for it came from the Latin word *cicer*, meaning chickpea. Cicero turned this to his advantage by not taking it seriously. When in Sicily he had a silver plate made as an offering to the gods. As his signature, he had his first names, Marcus Tullius, inscribed and in place of his surname, the design of a chickpea. Later in his career his sense of humour may have partly deserted him, for according to Plutarch, he lost support by constantly bragging of his successes in court.

Cicero was a keen tourist and spent much of his spare time in Sicily looking at the Greek remains, especially in Syracuse, the home of the Roman governors. He toured the ancient city, examined the *latomie* (the quarries), and thought he had found Archimedes' tomb, hidden under brambles near the Agrigentine Gate. He also found documents referring to the time of Dionysius I. In *The Verrine Orations*, the speech he published after the trial but never delivered in full, he gave the following description of Syracuse:

You will often have been told that Syracuse is the largest of Greek

cities and the loveliest of all cities. Gentlemen, what you have been told is true. Its position is not only a strong one, but beautiful to behold in whatever direction it is approached, by land or sea. Its harbours are almost enfolded in the embrace of the city buildings, their entrances far apart, but their heads approaching till they meet each other. At their meeting place, that part of the town which is called the Island, being cut off from the rest by a narrow strip of sea, is re-united with it by a connecting bridge. So large is the city that it is described as being four great cities joined together.

One of these is the Island already mentioned, girdled by the two harbours, and extending to their two mouths or entrances. In this quarter is the house, once King Hiero's, which our governors regularly occupy. Here also are a number of temples, two much finer than the rest; namely that of Diana (Artemis/Apollo) and the other one that of Minerva (Athena, now incorporated into the Cathedral), a place rich in treasures in the days before Verres arrived there. At one extremity of this island is the spring of fresh water called Arethusa; an incredibly large spring, teeming with fish, and so placed that it would be swamped by the sea waves but for the protection of a massive stone wall.

Then there is a second town in the city, called Achradina: this contains a broad market-place, some fine colonnades, a richly adorned town hall, a spacious senate house, and the noble temple of Olympian Jupiter (Zeus), besides the rest of the town, which is filled with private houses, and divided by one broad continuous street crossed by a number of others.

There is a third town, called Tycha from the ancient temple of Fortune that once stood there; this contains a spacious athletic ground and several temples, and is also a crowded and thickly inhabited part of the city.

And there is a fourth town, which being the most recently built is called Neapolis: on the highest point of this stands the great theatre; besides which there are two splendid temples, one of Ceres (Demeter) and the other of Libera (Kore) and a large and beautiful statue of Apollo Temenites . . . which if Verres had been able to transport he would have not have hesitated to carry off.[13]

The fifth district in Greek times was Epipoli, occupying the ridge above the city and containing the Euryalus Castle, not mentioned by Cicero perhaps because it was outside the perimeter of the Roman city.

Cicero goes on to list the treasures of Syracuse stolen by Verres. The initial looting of the city was by Marcellus, after the siege. Verres took his haul, when governor of the province, in peacetime. It included a set of pictures from the Temple of Athena showing a cavalry engagement of Agathocles; 27 pictures, some of them portraits of the tyrants and kings of Syracuse; the doors of the temple, wrought in ivory and gold; a statue of Sappho by Silanon (a sculptor from the third century); Delphic marble, bronze bowls and Corinthian pottery. Verres did not hesitate to raid the sacred sites and he removed a giant statue of Zeus, one of three such statues, famous throughout the ancient world.

Verres lived a life of luxury in Syracuse, according to Cicero, moving to a summer camp in Ortygia, where he entertained the women of the city.

This new variety of military commander used to pitch a fixed camp for himself in the loveliest part of Syracuse. At the very entrance of the harbour, where the bay begins to run in from the open coast towards the city, he set up a number of pavilions made of linen canvas stretched on poles. From the governor's residence, once King Hiero's palace, he moved house to this new spot so completely that during these periods nobody could ever see him outside it.[14]

The damage done by Verres in Sicily was naturally emphasised by Cicero. In reality, Sicily in Cicero's time benefited from peaceful conditions and a renewed demand for her agricultural products. Smaller farms existed alongside the large estates and productivity was improving. Much of the island was enjoying reasonable prosperity, which was disturbed, but not destroyed, by Verres. Estimates of the population of Sicily at the time range from 600,000 to 1 million, with three cities, Panormus, Catania and Syracuse, containing a population in excess of 10,000.[15] The size of Syracuse was thus nothing like that in the Greek era. For the citizens of Syracuse, the essential difference was that, under the Romans, they were no longer the protagonists and like any part of the empire, they were obliged to order their lives according to the rules established in Rome.

## The civil wars

It was Cicero's misfortune that the peak of his career coincided with the crisis at the end of the Republic. As the strong men battled for control of Rome, rational debate and the rule of law were brushed

aside. Cicero, despite a period in exile, had many successes to his name, particularly the putting down of the Cataline conspiracy. He was now one of the most powerful men in Rome and the state's leading prosecutor. In the struggle between Caesar and Pompey, he did his best to mediate between the factions but he was in an impossible position.

The situation changed dramatically in 44 with Caesar's assassination. A triumvirate of Mark Antony, Octavian (the future emperor Augustus) and Lepidus took charge and led the war against Caesar's assassins, Cassius and Brutus. Cicero stood out as the champion of the Republic, strongly criticising Antony. To consolidate their power the triumvirate met a year later to prepare a proscription. This was a list of people declared outlaws, who could be killed by anyone, and their estates confiscated by the state. It was an established means of dealing with enemies and raising funds. Antony hated Cicero, who had published speeches against him, and despite initial opposition from Octavian, Cicero was put on the list, which totalled 2,000 men, including 300 senators.

Aware of the danger, Cicero fled to his property on the coast, to where he was followed by a centurion and a group of soldiers. According to Plutarch, Cicero died bravely. As soon as he heard the soldiers coming, he ordered his servants to set down the litter where they were.

He himself, in that characteristic posture of his, with his chin resting on his left hand, looked steadfastly at his murderers. He was all covered in dust; his hair long and disordered, and his face was pinched and wasted by his anxieties.[16]

He stretched his neck out of the litter to receive the blow.

By a twist of fate, Verres was on the same proscription, included by Antony for his well-publicised fortune, and so died for his stolen treasures.

In the general chaos, Sextus Pompey, Pompey's son, established himself in Sicily with a strong naval force, where he was joined by a collection of rebel soldiers and escaped slaves. Here he controlled the sea lanes to Italy and succeeded in cutting off the grain supply to Rome, causing real hardship in the capital. Sicily suffered too, from the lack of trade and from the costs of maintaining the armed forces. Once Brutus and Cassius had been defeated in 42, the triumvirate turned their attention to Sextus. The responsibility fell to Octavian, who was not a natural military commander, and who lost several sea

battles, and was lucky to escape with his life. Agrippa, who became Octavian's leading general, finally defeated Sextus in 36. Towards the end the army deserted Lepidus, who was also involved in the fighting, thus strengthening Octavian's position. Sextus, who fled to Asia Minor, was caught soon afterwards and executed.

The war reduced Sicily to a weakened state, comparable to that after the Carthaginian wars. The fighting had been very destructive, especially in the east of the island, with Syracuse badly damaged, and had involved as many as 200,000 men and 1,000 warships. Octavian made things worse by imposing indemnities upon the cities which had defied him. Large pieces of land, occupied by his troops, were retained by Octavian and settled later by veterans from his legions.

The way was now clear for the final showdown with Antony, which took place in 31, during a campaign in Greece that culminated in the battle of Actium. The combination of Octavian's thorough planning and Agrippa's tactical genius won the day. Octavian then invaded Egypt to finish the war, and following the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra, he was finally in control of Rome.

## Augustus and the Empire

Octavian restored peace, reduced the size of the army and reviewed the constitution. His position in Rome was consolidated with the help of funds from the Egyptian treasury, to which he had helped himself. In 27, at the age of 36, with the support of the Roman Senate, he took the title of Imperator Caesar Augustus. His reforms and leadership led to a lasting political settlement that enabled Rome's future expansion.

Cicero's reputation was restored by Augustus after Antony's attacks. His son, Marcus, was brought into government and served as consul in 30. Cicero's speeches and works of philosophy have been studied by statesmen and academics ever since. He would probably have been amused to know that generations of schoolboys would struggle with translations of his *Verrines*.

In 21 Augustus set out on a tour of the empire, stopping first in Sicily. Here he set up a programme of regeneration, comparable to that of Timoleon, to repair the damage of the civil wars. Six cities were granted the status of *colonia*, which brought with it full Roman citizenship: Syracuse, Panormus, Tauromenium, Catania, Tyndaris and Thermae. Rebuilding and resettlement followed in these and other cities of Sicily.

Syracuse benefited from a major public building programme, which included the amphitheatre. Augustus must have liked Syracuse, for not only did he give her the lion's share of the building, but he called an apartment in his palace in Rome, his Syracuse. This was where he kept his collection of art treasures, some of them possibly from the city. Syracuse gets a mention in one of Augustus' favourite poems, *The Aeneid*, the mythical story of Rome's foundation. In this way, the Greek legends, including that of Arethusa, became absorbed into Roman literature.

Stretched in front of a bay of Sicily lies an islet over against wavebeat Plemyrium; they of old called it Ortygia. Hither Alpheus the river of Elis, such is the tale, has cloven a secret passage beneath the sea, and now through thy well-head, Arethusa, mingles with the Sicilian waves.[17]

Under the Roman Empire, Sicily settled down to a long, peaceful period of relative prosperity. From the Roman perspective, the island's role was to pay her taxes and supply the grain without causing trouble. As long as this continued, she was left alone. While other provinces, such as Egypt and Spain, came on stream as additional sources of grain, Sicily remained an important supplier, with Panormus replacing Syracuse as the major port for Rome. Romans settled in the major cities, providing a political and military ruling class, which was Latin speaking. Veterans of the Roman legions were allocated plots of land, some on the fertile Catania plain, while the big estates continued to be worked by slaves. The bulk of the population remained Greek speaking and Greek in culture.

As Sicily faded from the limelight, it became a place where wealthy Romans liked to take their holidays, climbing Mount Etna and visiting Syracuse, renowned despite the looting as a city of art. Only a few emperors visited Sicily after Augustus. They included Hadrian and Septimus Severus, who had been governor, and Caligula, who liked Syracuse, organised games in the city and rebuilt temples and the city walls. Information on the island becomes scarce under the Roman Empire until the rise of the Christian communities gives Sicily, and the city of Syracuse, renewed importance.

# CHAPTER 7

## Santa Lucia and the Early Christians

At its peak under the emperors Trajan and Hadrian in the early second century, the Roman Empire embraced the whole Mediterranean world, plus large parts of northern and central Europe. It was the greatest empire the world had seen and the impact upon the peoples within its borders was profound and long lasting. Crisis hit in the third century through a combination of invasion, civil war and economic decline. The borders to the north and east were under constant threat, while in the Mediterranean, including in Sicily, raids were carried out by northern tribes. Syracuse was among the cities sacked in one of these raids.[1]

Under the Romans, religion in Sicily initially continued as in Greek times. The pantheon of Greek gods was still worshipped, absorbed into Roman culture and re-emerging with Latin names. Zeus thus became Jupiter, or Jove; Athena became Minerva; Artemis, Diana and Demeter became Ceres. In any case, eastern Sicily remained largely Greek in culture and language, with only a small elite speaking Latin.

From the early days of Roman rule new cults began to spread across the Mediterranean from the east, especially from Egypt and Syria. They reached Syracuse via her traditional connections with Alexandria and through slaves brought to eastern Sicily to work on the estates. These eastern deities offered an intense religious experience through participation in elaborate initiation ceremonies, festivals and mystery plays. Some offered their initiates a promise of immortality. The site in Syracuse known as the Roman Gymnasium, in reality a theatre and temple complex, may have been the centre of one of these cults.

Among the most popular was Isis, the Egyptian goddess, who was featured on Syracusan coins, and the remains of whose temples have been found in Sicily. From Syria came Atargatis, the goddess who was half woman, half fish. Among her followers was Eunus, the Syrian slave who started the first slave revolt in Sicily. Asclepius, a cult of Greek origin, represented a god with the power of healing, the son of Apollo. Cicero describes a temple to Asclepius in Syracuse and a marble head, possibly from the temple, can be seen in the Archaeological Museum. Syracuse, with her position on the trade

routes to the eastern Mediterranean, was wide open to these influences, which became popular alongside traditional beliefs during the first three centuries AD.

Jewish immigration to Sicily, which began before the Christian era, also came from the eastern Mediterranean. It increased after the brutal reaction of the Romans to the Jewish uprisings in Palestine in the first and second centuries, which led to a large displacement in population. Jewish communities built up in the main cities on the island and in the countryside. Syracuse had her own Jewish community, with its own quarter in the city, which would become very significant.

## The coming of Christianity

After Christ was crucified in the reign of Emperor Tiberius, his apostles led by St Peter and St Paul spread his teaching through the cities of the ancient Near East. Christianity made a powerful impact with its message of universal love, reaching out to men and women, rich and poor, the oppressed and the slaves. Persecution was never far behind, for to the Romans religion and patriotism were closely linked, so that in their eyes a new faith that owed allegiance to its own deity was a direct challenge to their authority. They feared that Christianity might lead to disobedience, for example, in the army. Persecutions went in waves, with the Christians often being used as scapegoats for acts of rebellion.

The early Christian period in Sicily remains obscure. There are several theories on the origin of Christianity on the island; one is that it arrived from Rome rather than directly from the Middle East and another is that it began in the Jewish communities on the east coast. Neither is proven. In the absence of contemporary sources we have to rely on accounts written much later, so that disentangling legend from historical fact is almost impossible. Luckily there is considerable archaeological evidence in Syracuse from this period. What is likely is that Syracuse, the provincial capital, was the centre for early Christianity on the island, a claim supported by her extensive catacombs, second in scale only to those in Rome. The catacombs were the underground burial chambers of the early Christians, carved out of the rock in locations just outside the city walls. The earliest burials took place there around 200. The first documented Christian figures appear in the mid-third century, the saints and martyrs Marciano, Bishop of Syracuse, and Agata of Catania, who were followed early in the fourth century by Euplus of Catania and Lucia of

Syracuse.

Much later, in the seventh and eighth centuries, monks writing their accounts of the early Christian period added their own embellishments. They claimed that St Peter, after establishing the first Christian Church at Antioch in Syria, sent his disciple Marciano to preach the gospel in Syracuse. Here Marciano supposedly set up the second Christian Church on the site of the Crypt of S. Marciano, a small underground chapel that can be seen today. It was also claimed that St Paul preached in Syracuse in the same crypt where, it is said, Marciano was later martyred by the Romans. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that Paul did visit Syracuse on his way from Malta to Rome.

And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse we tarried there three days.[2]

In Rome he founded the Christian Church with Peter before they both died in the persecutions of Nero. The relationship of the Syracusan Church with St Peter and St Paul is celebrated at the front of the Cathedral, where statues of the saints stand either side of the entrance, extensions of the Baroque facade built in the eighteenth century.

While the tradition remains strong, no historical evidence has been found to support these claims. Though there may have been a small Christian community in Syracuse in the first two centuries AD, the evidence of it only starts around the year 200.[3]

## Santa Lucia

Santa Lucia, patron saint of Syracuse, is an outstanding figure in the city's story. Few facts are known about her life except that she died for her Christian faith, in the persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian, on 13 December 304. Her following began not long after her death, and by the sixth century she was recognised by the whole church, included in the Roman Canon by Pope Gregory the Great. The earliest documentation of her story dates from the fifth or the early sixth centuries, in a Latin and a Greek version, the latter known as the Papadopoulos Codex, named after the Greek priest who wrote it.

Lucia was born sometime between 283 and 290 to a noble family in Syracuse. She was brought up by her mother, Eutichia, as her father had died when she was young. Taught by her mother, Lucia followed

the Christian faith from an early age. She became engaged to be married to a pagan, a patrician, possibly one of the commanders of the Roman legion stationed in Syracuse.

Eutichia had been suffering for 40 years from an incurable blood disease. One day she and Lucia set out to pray at the tomb of Sant' Agata in Catania. Agata had been martyred by the Romans around 50 years before for refusing to renounce her Christian faith, and she became the protectoress of the city, famous throughout Sicily for her miracles. Tradition has it that when an eruption of Etna threatened to engulf Catania, the population prayed to Agata for help. Her veil was placed in the path of the burning lava where it halted, saving the city. When Lucia prayed at the tomb for help in curing her mother's disease, Agata appeared to her in a dream saying: 'Lucia, my sister, virgin consecrated to God, why do you ask of me what you can grant your mother yourself? Why, through your faith she has already been cured.'[4] On waking up Lucia found this to be true.

Mother, by the grace of God you are cured and truly your prayers have been answered. I beg you now, do not speak to me again of a husband, and anything you were going to give me as a dowry for marriage to a mortal husband, let me use in the name of Christ our Lord.

After this they returned to Syracuse where Lucia, determined upon her course of action, began to sell her goods and distribute them to the poor. When the man to whom she was betrothed heard what was happening, he reported it to the Roman Governor, Paschasius, accusing her of being a Christian and of violating Roman law. The emperor at the time was Diocletian, who had spent the early years of his rule suppressing attacks on the northern and eastern frontiers. So great were the threats that he later concluded that the empire was too much for one man to handle and divided it into two, east and west, each ruled by a senior and a junior emperor known as Augustus and Caesar respectively. Towards the end of his rule, nervous of internal trouble, he brought in the last and cruellest of the Christian persecutions. In 303 came the first of his edicts ordering the destruction of Christian scriptures and places of worship. This was followed early in 304 by an edict compelling everyone to be prepared to sacrifice to the Roman gods, an act of allegiance to Rome, and one that renounced the Christian faith. Christians who refused to do so faced the death penalty.

Arrested and brought before the governor, Lucia gave a spirited

account of herself during her interrogation. Replying to the order to sacrifice to the Roman gods, Lucia said:

The right sacrifice to God is to visit the widows, orphans, pilgrims, the sick and the needy. This I have been doing for the past three years, giving everything I have. As after death it is not possible to make sacrifices, I offer myself to God to do with me as He pleases.[5]

Annoyed by this reply, Paschasius said:

| | |
|---|---|
| | *I obey the laws of Caesar and I won't listen to this.* |
| Lucia replied: | *You keep the laws of Caesar, as I follow the laws of my God; you fear his orders, I love my God.* |
| At this, Paschasius lost his composure: | |
| | *Enough of this talk, we will start the torture.* |
| Lucia: | *God's words will not be silenced.* |
| Paschasius: | *Are you then a God?* |
| Lucia: | *I serve Eternal God, and He says that when you are dealing with governors and kings you do not have to think about how to speak, the Holy Spirit will speak for you.* |
| Paschasius: | *The Holy Spirit is in you?* |
| Lucia: | *The apostle says, those who live chaste and pious lives are temples to God and the Holy Spirit lives in them.* |
| Paschasius: | *If you do not obey the laws of the emperors you will suffer cruel torments.* |
| Lucia: | *You will never change my mind and get me to commit a sin. Here is my body in front of you. What are you waiting for?* |

Paschasius, by now furious, was determined to break her spirit and ordered a number of tortures to be inflicted upon her. But protected by the Holy Spirit, she was able to withstand them. When soldiers tried to drag her away to be raped in a brothel, she became so heavy that the soldiers could not move her, not even with the aid of a team of oxen. Urine was poured over her, which the Romans thought could banish witchcraft. A fire was built around her, pitch and boiling oil

were poured on her, all without doing her any harm. Lucia declared: 'I prayed to God to grant me this delay so that I might show believers the value of martyrdom and take away the pride of unbelievers.' Finally companions of Paschasius led Lucia off elsewhere to be killed. Before she died, Lucia foresaw that peace would come to the church, that she would become the protectoress of Syracuse and that Diocletian's rule would soon end. Then one of Paschasius' companions plunged a dagger into her throat and she was decapitated.[6]

In other versions it is claimed that her eyes were put out, but this is not generally accepted.[7] The name Lucia, the origin of which means light, probably influenced this tradition and explains why she is the patron saint of the blind.

The following year Diocletian was struck by a sudden illness, gave up being emperor, and retired to his estate in Dalmatia.

The example of her death made a big impression and recognition followed rapidly. A sanctuary was built at the place where she died, possibly as early as 340, which attracted many pilgrims. Later a monastery was added, where S. Zosimo was abbot. In 384 a church was dedicated to her in Ravenna by Bishop Urso, a Sicilian, who also gave his Sicilian property to her church. The most important find concerning Lucia's cult was made by Paolo Orsi, director of antiquities in Syracuse in 1894, when exploring the catacombs of S. Giovanni. He came across a marble tablet dating from around 400, containing an epitaph in Greek to a woman who died on the feast day of *My Lady Lucia.* Veneration of Lucia and the recognition of her feast day were thus definitely established at the end of the fourth century.

Lucia's body was first buried, close to where she died, in a simple tomb cut out of the rock next to the catacombs, which had been in use since about 200. Here it lay until George Maniaces, a Byzantine Greek general, took it to Constantinople in 1039, as a present for the empress. When in 1204 the Fourth Crusade captured and sacked Constantinople, the body was taken by the Venetians to Venice, where it remained. Today it lies in the church of S. Geremia, on the Grand Canal. It was lent to Syracuse for one week in December 2004 for celebrations to mark 1,700 years from Lucia's death, as described in the Prologue.

## Constantine, the first Christian emperor

The reforms of Diocletian, which divided the empire into east and

west and split the power of the emperor between four men, soon proved unworkable and led to civil war. Out of the chaos that followed, one man emerged as the central figure and eventual victor. This was Constantine, an ambitious, visionary leader who would radically transform the empire in such a way that, in the east, it would last for another thousand years. Before a battle that he fought outside Rome, near the Milvian Bridge over the Tiber, he is supposed to have seen the sign of the cross in the sky. This was followed by a famous victory, which led him to support Christianity. The Edict of Tolerance, introduced in 313 by Constantine with his co-emperor, Licinius, freed Christians from further persecution. The penalties for following Christianity were removed and confiscated Christian property was to be returned.

In Sicily the new freedom led to a much larger Christian community in the second half of the fourth century, with Syracuse at the centre. The Christians in Syracuse, instead of abandoning their catacombs after the Edict of Toleration, greatly expanded them, turning them into the city's main cemetery. It is clear from the scale and decoration of the catacombs that the Christian community grew rapidly in size and prosperity. The year after the Edict, Syracuse sent the only representative from Sicily, her Bishop Chrestus, to a Christian Council in Arles set up by Constantine to reconcile different interpretations of Christian beliefs.

In Rome the church grew in wealth and organisation so that a century later Pope Leo I was writing to the bishops of Sicily to send three of their number to the half-yearly meetings in Rome and forbidding the sale of church property. By then the church owned substantial estates in Sicily, which were administered by the bishops, who as the spiritual descendants of the apostles held considerable power at local level. The doctrine and forms of celebration adopted by the Roman Church were closely followed in Sicily, as links had been maintained between the two churches since the days of the persecutions. Sicily continued to be run from Rome, but increasingly by the church rather than by the state and was now effectively part of the diocese of Italy.

In Syracuse there is further evidence to support the theory of an expansion in the Christian community in this period. A church in Ortygia possibly dates from the second half of the fourth century, S. Pietro (the one remaining of four built by Bishop Germano) while an elaborate sarcophagus, from the mid-fourth century, found in the

catacomb of S. Giovanni, displays detailed scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Catacombs from the period have also been found outside Syracuse in locations including Palermo, Akrai and Modica.

Constantine became sole ruler of the empire in 324, reuniting east and west in his lifetime, and did much to establish Christianity. He built churches to honour the holy places and early martyrs. Among them were the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, on the supposed site of the crucifixion; a church dedicated to St Paul, near his tomb just outside the walls of Rome; and the Old St Peter's Basilica, also in Rome, on the site where Peter died. In the sixteenth century, Pope Julius II pulled down the Old Basilica, replacing it with the St Peter's that stands there today. On Constantine's order, bishops from all over the empire met to resolve disagreements and to start the process of defining Christian doctrine. All issues were resolved as Constantine wanted, including the adoption of the western method of calculating Easter Day, which ensured that it did not coincide with Passover. The Nicene Creed was another product of the council. Eusebius, a bishop who attended the council and who later wrote a biography of Constantine, described the emperor's presence as follows:

He proceeded through the midst of the assembly like some heavenly messenger of God, clothed in raiment which glittered as it were with rays of light, reflecting the glowing radiance of a purple robe, and adorned with the brilliant splendour of gold and precious stones.[8]

Constantine then made another big decision. Never at his ease in Rome, which was becoming increasingly provincial as the main focus of events turned towards the east, he chose Byzantium as the site for his new capital. The city, which was small and unimportant at the time, had been a Roman settlement since 73 AD. It had, however, a superb location, protected on two sides by the sea, on a strategic point at the far eastern end of the Mediterranean, with access to the Black Sea. Teams of workmen laboured night and day to create the New Rome, greatly extending the perimeter of old city, fitting out the harbour and constructing elaborate public buildings, decorated with statues collected from all over the empire. In May 330 the new capital, named Constantinople in the emperor's honour, was dedicated in a mass to the Christian God. Constantine died seven years later, leaving an empire incomparably strengthened by his actions, and earning his title of Constantine the Great.

Rome came under relentless pressure from northern tribes in the fifth century, and with her reduced military and economic power,

became increasingly vulnerable. The Goths under Alaric took Rome in 410, sacking the city and leaving soon afterwards. The Vandals, another Germanic tribe, had established themselves in Carthage, which had been refounded by the Romans and had become an important city again as the centre of the African Province. From here they carried out raids into Southern Italy and Sicily, entering Rome in 455 and systematically removing anything of value that they could find. The coup de grace came in 476 when the young Emperor Romulus Augustulus was forced to abdicate. Constantinople, from this point, became the sole capital of the empire, from where the Roman tradition would be continued. This would last for nearly 1,000 years, until the city fell to the Turks in 1453.

# CHAPTER 8

## Byzantium and the Arab Siege

When Justinian I became emperor in 527 the Persians were once again threatening Constantinople. Once a peace treaty had been made, Justinian was free to turn his attention to the west, where he faced two major challenges. The Western Empire had been lost a century earlier, as the Vandal Kingdom in Africa and the Ostrogoths in Italy took over these territories. The Christian Church had expanded rapidly but was increasingly split, with bitter arguments going on between Rome and Constantinople. At the heart of the disagreement was the definition of the nature of Christ. Was he both man and God, the orthodox view held in Rome, or was he purely divine, the heresy popular in the eastern provinces? Justinian's attempts to deal with these questions would dominate most of his reign.

In Justinian's day Constantinople was a powerful, imperial city combining the authority of the emperor with that of the eastern church. It was also a brilliant artistic and cultural centre, representing influences from east and west, renowned for its beautiful public buildings decorated with marble statues. The unique character of the eastern church was reflected in its churches through icons, mosaics and the figure of *Christ Pantocrator* (Christ All-Powerful). The Imperial Palace, where the emperor lived with his household attended by personal servants, advisers and bodyguards, was organised to stress the emperor's status as ruler. The court's calendar was filled with elaborate ceremonies, where the emperor and his family appeared in sumptuous dresses, reflecting the Persian influence. It was a totalitarian regime in which members of the aristocracy, military commanders, religious leaders and foreign diplomats all jostled for position in an atmosphere of flattery, fear and intrigue.

Shortly before becoming emperor, Justinian married Theodora, the daughter of a bear keeper with a distinctly racy past. A strong character with a firm grip on her husband, she became co-ruler, standing in for the emperor on occasion and influencing decisions at the highest level. Despite the intrigues and clandestine support for causes opposed to the emperor, she never lost Justinian's loyalty and remained his closest confidante throughout her life.

Next to the palace, and connected to it by a passage providing the

emperor with secure access, stood the Hippodrome, the centre of the city's social life. This was where the horse races were held. Rebuilt by Constantine to hold 80,000 spectators, the Hippodrome was the stage for the four-horse racing chariot, the descendant of the ancient Greek *quadriga.* Four chariots usually competed at a time from the opposing teams, which had come down to two, the Blues and the Greens. Support was fanatical, which often led to serious disturbance and riots. The most notorious riots took place in 532, which looked like posing a real threat to Justinian. Known as the Nika Riots, named after the cry of *Nika*! (Victory!) shouted by supporters, they were put down at the cost of 30,000 dead, by troops under the command of a young general named Belisarius.

## The campaigns of Belisarius

Although he ruled from Constantinople, Justinian saw himself as Roman Emperor, with a duty to continue the Roman traditions, and reuniting the empire became one of his missions in life. The decision to send an expedition to Africa was taken when Hilderic, Justinian's ally in the Vandal Kingdom, was deposed by Gelimer, who set himself up as the new king. Belisarius, after his suppression of the Nika Riots, was appointed to command the expedition. It was a risky enterprise, for earlier expeditions to Africa had ended in disaster. In the summer of 533 the emperor collected the fleet together in Constantinople. There were 500 ships to transport the soldiers, 10,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry, both regular troops and auxiliaries. Military techniques had changed significantly since the early days of Imperial Rome, adapting to tactics employed by the barbarian tribes. Archers now played an important part in armies that tended to be smaller in size. Among the troops was a detachment of Huns, some of the most feared fighters of their day, who fought on horseback with a short, powerful bow. The transport ships were protected by 92 warships, the so-called *dromons*, the Greek for 'runner'. Developed from the ancient trireme, these were narrow, fast ships, propelled by oar and sail, and carrying a central tower from which missiles could be fired. They came in varying designs and were the main Byzantine warship.

When the fleet was ready, the emperor ordered the general's flagship to anchor opposite the royal palace. In a brief ceremony prayers were said and, as a good omen, a young soldier who had just converted to Christianity joined the flagship. The fleet then set sail, stopping to load horses, a gift from the emperor, at Heracleia on the

Sea of Marmora. On board the flagship were Belisarius, his wife Antonina and his secretary Procopius, who would later write a history of the wars.

Before crossing to Africa, Belisarius put in to a location on the east coast of Sicily, near Mount Etna. He needed provisions for the fleet, more horses, and intelligence on the movements of the Vandals. Procopius, who was sent to Syracuse to see what he could find, reported as follows:

Now when Procopius reached Syracuse, he unexpectedly met a man who had been a fellow-citizen and friend of his from childhood, who had been living in Syracuse for a long time engaged in the shipping business, and he learned from him what he wanted; for this man showed him a domestic who had three days before that very day come from Carthage, and he said that they need not suspect that there would be any ambush set for the fleet by the Vandals.[1]

The Vandals were apparently unaware of the approach of the expedition, part of their forces were occupied in Sardinia, and their leader, Gelimer, was staying inland, some four days journey from the coast.

When Procopius heard this, he took the hand of the domestic and walked to the harbour of Arethousa where his boat lay at anchor, making many enquiries of the man and searching out every detail.[2]

When Belisarius heard this information, and the supplies had been stored away on board, he gave orders for the fleet to set sail for the African coast.

Gelimer's first reaction on hearing the news of the fleet's imminent arrival was revenge, and he ordered his brother, Ammatas, to kill Hilderic, the pro-Byzantine Vandal chief whom he had deposed. The death of the rightful king gave added legitimacy to the expedition. Gelimer was full of confidence, for even with some of his forces in Sardinia, he still had plenty of troops at his disposal. He prepared to ambush the Romans, as the Byzantines liked to be called, on their way to Carthage. When the two armies met, a series of separate engagements took place, during the first of which Gelimer's brother was killed. In the second, Belisarius unleashed his cavalry of Huns, the savagery of which chased the enemy from the field. Finally Gelimer, having gained a temporary initiative, was unnerved by finding his brother's dead body and missed his opportunity to press the advantage. The battle was lost and the Vandals, Gelimer among them, fled inland, leaving Carthage open to Belisarius.

Belisarius entered Carthage in mid-September where he received the city's leaders and ensured that no damage was caused by his troops, reminding them that the Africans had been citizens of Rome in the past. Then he strengthened the city's defences, which had fallen into disrepair. Meanwhile Gelimer had been collecting his forces together, greatly outnumbering the Romans, and in December attacked Carthage. Surprised by the improvements in the defences, the Vandals were repulsed. Belisarius took the offensive and brought his army out of the city. In the battle that followed Roman discipline and superior tactics proved decisive, the turning point being once more an attack by the Hun cavalry. The Vandals were routed and three months later, on the promise of a safe passage, Gelimer surrendered.

In the summer of 534 Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople. He left behind him most of the troops and some of his personal guard, for the task of bringing the province under control was far from complete. Justinian granted the general a triumph in Constantinople. Belisarius marched into the Hippodrome with huge acclaim from the crowd, followed by his personal guard, Gelimer and the other Vandal prisoners and wagons laden with treasures from Carthage. These included sacred pieces taken from Jerusalem by Emperor Titus, found by the Vandals in Rome, and which were later returned to Jerusalem. Finally Belisarius and Gelimer, in a gesture of obeisance, prostrated themselves in front of Justinian and Theodora. They were both rewarded by the emperor. Gelimer left with his family for a comfortable retirement in Galacia, while Belisarius was made consul, an honorary title of great prestige, recalling the Roman traditions.

Belisarius was one of the great Roman generals, and the success of the expedition was largely due to his leadership. As a commander he had outstanding abilities, but he also had an Achilles heel. This was his relationship with the two people who mattered to him most, his wife and the emperor.

In military matters he reigned supreme, rivalled only by Narses, a general promoted later by Justinian. From an early age Belisarius was a student of the military arts. Influenced by the Huns, he developed a fighting unit of horsemen armed with a lance, a bow and arrows, a broadsword and shield, all of which they were trained to use at a gallop. When a general in his 20s, his detachment of guards became a versatile, elite unit, a match for any in the empire. He was courageous in battle, where he would be seen in the thick of the action. Among his maxims was never to fight an unnecessary battle. He was not

afraid to take on a superior force, reassuring his troops that few generals could control an army of 40,000, and even fewer of 80,000. He was a fighting general in the best Roman tradition, a tall charismatic figure loved by his troops.

Antonina, Belisarius' wife, was an attractive woman who had been a dancer before their marriage. Like Theodora, the emperor's wife who was a close friend, her background was in the entertainment world linked to the Hippodrome. Several years older than Belisarius, she had children from previous liaisons. While she had Belisarius' complete loyalty, her infidelities caused him a lot of trouble, especially her affair with their godson, Theodosius. Nevertheless, Antonina proved to be a stalwart companion on the military campaigns, assisting Belisarius in a variety of practical ways.

Justinian also benefited from Belisarius' complete loyalty, but as the general's success and popularity grew, so did the emperor's jealousy. There was just no room in Constantinople for a celebrity who might rival the emperor. Justinian, wrongly advised by Theodora, even began to believe the rumours that Belisarius might be about to seize for himself a territory in the west.

## Sicily becomes a Byzantine province

Later that year, at the start of the campaign to re-conquer Italy, Belisarius took Sicily for Byzantium with an army of 7,500 men, plus some of his famous guards. After his conquest of Africa his reputation on the island was sky high. Catania fell without a struggle. At Syracuse the Gothic Governor, Sinderic, surrendered immediately. Only at Palermo did the Romans meet any resistance, with the city gates closed against them. Sailing his ships right up to the city walls, Belisarius hoisted small boats up the masts to a height that overlooked the city. From there his marksmen fired volleys of arrows down the streets, terrifying the citizens. Palermo soon capitulated. On 31 December 535, the last day of his consulship, Belisarius entered Syracuse, as described by Procopius:

And at that time it so happened that there fell to Belisarius a piece of good fortune beyond the power of words to describe. For, having received the dignity of the consulship because of his victory over the Vandals, while he was still holding this honour, and after he had won the whole of Sicily, on the last day of his consulship, he marched into Syracuse, loudly applauded by the army and by the Sicilians and

throwing golden coins to all.[3]

After a brief return to Carthage to quell an uprising, Belisarius crossed into Italy and took Naples and Rome from the Goths in a year of campaigning. He was then besieged in Rome by a huge Gothic army. His successful defence of the city, with an army of 5,000 against tens of thousands of Goths, was a triumph of military skill. Subsequently Milan and Ravenna also fell to his army. Ravenna would become an important outpost of Byzantium in the west, recalled by the famous mosaics that feature portraits of Justinian and Theodora. Before his victories could be consolidated, Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople where he was needed to confront the Persians, who had broken the peace treaty and were advancing into Byzantine territory. The timing proved disastrous, for in a short time a new Gothic army under Totila had retaken Northern Italy and Rome. As soon as he could be spared, Belisarius returned to Italy, where he spent five frustrating years stemming the tide of Gothic advance but unable to achieve a knockout blow for lack of resources. Victory was later won for the Romans by Narses, a general in his 80s, whom Justinian entrusted with a much larger army.

The later years of Belisarius were tragic, as he lost the emperor's trust, and was arrested on a corruption charge. While others faced execution, Belisarius was allowed to retire, but lost his estates and control of his guards. He died three years later at the age of 65. While the legend that he was blinded and ended his life begging in the streets of the capital is not generally accepted, it left Belisarius the heroic subject of numerous paintings and biographies.

Justinian, who died in the same year, has been placed alongside Constantine as a great emperor for his legal reforms, his wonderful buildings, his efforts to re-unite the church and for his re-conquest of Italy and Africa. The territorial conquests proved to be only temporary, for the empire was shortly to face new threats. Financially, Justinian left the empire in ruins.

Procopius, Belisarius' secretary, left comprehensive histories of his master's military campaigns, in the tradition of the ancient Greek historians. He also published a book on Justinian's buildings. His dislike of his masters and mistresses was allowed full reign in his *Secret History,* a scurrilous account written in graphic detail of the affairs at Justinian's court.

The result of Belisarius' campaign in 535 was to make Sicily a Byzantine province, with Syracuse the capital, for the next 300 years.

Sicily fell so easily as the Sicilians probably thought that Byzantine rule would be easier than that of Rome and they wanted protection from barbarian raids, which Belisarius appeared to offer. Constantinople was heavily influenced by Greece, which may have been an added attraction to the largely Greek-speaking Sicilians. For Sicily, the aftermath of the campaign was disillusionment. In revenge for going over to Byzantium, Totila and his Goths invaded the island in 550, and while they failed to take the main cities, considerable destruction was caused inland. Justinian then sent his governor to administer the province, together with his tax gatherers, who imposed a heavy financial burden upon the island.

The church held vast tracts of land in Sicily, which had been given by converts or acquired following barbarian raids. The letters of Pope Gregory the Great reveal a detailed administration of church property, appointments and dogma, from which the island benefited. Six monasteries were founded in Gregory's time, and assistance was established for the poor together with tolerance of the Jewish faith. The majority of Sicily was now Christian, alongside a sizeable Jewish community and a minority who still held pagan beliefs.

Syracuse was an important centre for the church and near the city lay of some of its major estates. Maximiano, a friend of Pope Gregory, became bishop of Syracuse, strengthening the ties to Rome. Towards the end of the sixth century the pagan temples began to be consecrated as churches, including the Temple of Athena in Ortygia, which was dedicated to the Mother of God. Some 50 years later Bishop Zosimo made it the cathedral, in preference to another church located outside the city walls. In Byzantine times churches were built above the catacombs at both the Santa Lucia and San Marciano locations. Within the Santa Lucia catacombs, frescoes in a small Christian sanctuary can be seen today, dating from this period.

## The rise of the Arabs

In the early seventh century a new force appeared in the Middle East that hastened the demise of the Roman Empire and had a dramatic impact upon Sicily. This was the expansion of the Arabs. Until then the people of Arabia had kept to themselves, remote desert people pursuing their lives isolated from the Roman Empire. After Prophet Mohammed died in 632, united by their new religion, the Arabs erupted out of their homeland in a wave of expansion on the back of military conquest. First to fall to their advance were the great

Christian cities of Damascus, Antioch and Jerusalem. Within 30 years all of Syria, Egypt and Persia had been taken, the advance going as far to the east as Afghanistan and India. Nothing like it had been seen since the days of Alexander the Great. Desert tribesmen, who were natural warriors, formed the core of their armies. Armed, like the troops of Belisarius, with a lance, sword, shield, bow and arrows, they were expert horsemen, supported by infantry. They fought in tribal groups, whose fierce family pride played an important role, and employed tactics that were ingenious and unexpected, making sudden attacks and sorties. Behind their success lay a mixture of discipline, a sense of brotherhood and boundless self-confidence. These were not raiders like the Goths and Vandals but a people on the move, looking to take new lands for the long term.

## Constans II in Syracuse

Constans II was crowned emperor in Constantinople in 641 at the age of 11, after a dispute over the succession following the early death of his father, Constantine III. His name was a diminutive of Constantine and when mature he was also known as *Pogonatus*, the Bearded, and his luxurious beard can be seen in his portrait on the coins of the time. His grandfather, Heraclius, during a reign of 31 years, had out-fought the Persians, dying sick and exhausted from his efforts. When Constans ascended the throne the Arabs were in the early stages of their expansion, and in the 640s Egypt was lost to the empire, with Alexandria burnt to the ground. Constans took his time to respond and when he did, the Byzantine fleet was destroyed and the emperor lucky to escape with his life.

As well as the new threat from the Arabs, Constans was faced with the long-running argument over the nature of Christ, which still had the church in ferment. Arrogant and impatient, Constans thought he could resolve the dispute by issuing an edict banning further discussion of the subject. This had the effect of alienating both sides. In Rome the edict was condemned by Pope Martin, which was taken in Constantinople as a direct challenge to the emperor's authority. Martin was arrested and brought to Constantinople where he was tried and found guilty. He was saved from execution, but after brutal treatment, he died six months later in exile. The actions of Constans were widely considered scandalous, to the extent that a suggestion was made to enrol Constans' brother Theodosius as co-emperor. Constans, who had already forced his unfortunate brother to become a

monk, now ordered his murder.

Constans then turned his attention to the west and the increasing threat from the Lombards in Italy and the Arabs in Africa. Leaving his wife and three young sons in Constantinople, he sailed with an army to Italy, where he was received in Rome by the Pope. Looting whatever valuables he could find in Rome, he turned south to Sicily, where in 663 he established his court in Syracuse. His aim was ostensibly to protect Sicily from Arab attacks, and the city became the emperor's base for the next five years. If the citizens of Syracuse had hopes that the arrival of the emperor would improve their fortunes, they were proved wrong. To pay for his entourage, Constans enforced on Sicily and the neighbouring provinces of Calabria, Sardinia and North Africa a harsh tax regime, which was at its most severe in Syracuse. It was far worse than anything experienced before, with high tax rates levied on everything from private individuals and property to industry and shipping. The debtors' prisons soon began to fill up.

Then one day in September 668 when Constans was at the Baths of Daphne, located on the far side of the Little Harbour in Syracuse, he was assassinated by a Greek bath attendant named Andrew, son of Troilus. Although only 38, Constans had ruled for 27 years. Theophanes, a monk writing in the early ninth century, tells us that: 'Andrew picked up the soap dish, hit him over the head, and ran away at once.'[4]

Constans, stunned by the blow, fell into the water and drowned, his death unlamented by his attendants or by the Syracusans. While no evidence of a conspiracy exists, there were plenty of motives for his killing. His unpopularity was widespread, especially among the aristocracy in Constantinople and the bishops in Sicily. He was hated in particular for the murder of his brother and for his treatment of Pope Martin. His move to Syracuse was unpopular, and rumours that it was about to become permanent could have been the last straw. After a brief dispute, he was succeeded by his eldest son, who ruled as Constantine IV, and who brought the court back to Constantinople.

## The Arab siege of Syracuse

In June 827 the Arabs landed at Mazara del Vallo, on the west coast of Sicily, intent upon capturing the island. They had viewed the richly fertile land and famous cities with envy for many years, as they

carried out sporadic raids inland. Now their aim was to colonise the island and Byzantium was too weakened to do anything about it. The landing was triggered by a request for help from a renegade Byzantine admiral named Euphemius, who had set himself up in Syracuse as a rival emperor, and who had been forced to flee. Euphemius landed at Mazara with an Arab force of 700 cavalry and 10,000 infantry, starting the war for Sicily that lasted for 50 years. It caused widespread destruction, comparable to the Punic Wars in the third century BC, and left many cities with burnt out shells. The Arabs took Palermo in 831 and tried on several occasions to capture Syracuse, which as the capital remained the key to Sicily. In the summer of 877 they approached the city once more, this time with a larger army under the command of the Emir Ibrahim ibn Ahmad.

Before the Arab advance, the Syracusans had abandoned their houses and churches on the mainland and had retreated into Ortygia, the ancient citadel. Surrounded on three sides by the sea, and separated from the mainland by an inland waterway, Ortygia retained strong natural defences, which had been strengthened by high walls and a tower facing the Great Harbour. The large Arab force encircled the defenders, blockading both ports and occupying the mainland. After some Syracusans had escaped to the hill towns, 15,000–20,000 citizens and a contingent of soldiers led by an anonymous nobleman remained to defend the city.

Theodosius, a monk who left an eye-witness account of the siege, described the tactics employed by the Arabs. They included battering the walls with rocks fired from huge catapults, approaching the walls from behind linked shields (the *tortoise*) or from their ships, burrowing under the defences to weaken them, hurling stones by day and making surprise attacks by night. Theodosius wrote that:

The enemy with all their troops besieged the city and they were so many as to seem incredible. It looked as if we were fighting a hundred of them to one of us, spurring us on to such valour and glory in the face of common danger that it was called a battle of giants.[5]

All through the winter and the following spring the Syracusans held off the attackers, every day hoping to see a relief fleet sail in from Constantinople. Eventually food ran out, as fishing was made impossible by the blockade, and all the livestock and vegetation was gone. People were reduced to eating skins and to grinding bones to make soup, with water still plentiful from the Arethusa Fountain. Conditions in the city became desperate after sickness broke out,

causing many deaths. Slowly the defences began to crumble, the walls pulverised by missiles and the defenders reducing daily in numbers. The focal point of the battle became the sector around the tower, as Theodosius wrote:

The tower, which stood in the right hand corner of the city by the Great Harbour, was partially destroyed by boulders fired from the enemy's great catapults. Five days later the wall next to the tower collapsed under the weight of the barrage, to the dismay of the defenders, who under the nobleman were pushed to their limits in holding the position. For twenty days and twenty nights they held the breech in the wall against constant attack from the enemy, exposing themselves to fearful wounds.[6]

It was Wednesday, 21 May 878, when the city fell. The exhausted defenders were finally overwhelmed when an intensive barrage of rocks destroyed the ladder that gave them access to the tower. Trapped inside the tower was a small group of soldiers, led by Giovanni Patriano, who were quickly overrun and killed by the Arabs.

From here they flowed like a torrent through the city and fell upon the defenders. They slaughtered everyone who had taken refuge in the Cathedral, breaking down the doors and entering with bloody swords to massacre the young and the old, monks and married men, priests and common people, freemen and servants.[7]

The nobleman who had led the defence was taken alive. He died bravely, executed eight days later on the orders of Busa, the Emir's son. Seventy soldiers, all from noble Syracusan families who had fought alongside the nobleman at the tower, were led away together and butchered outside the city walls. Niceta of Tarso, a military expert who had stayed to help the defence, was put to death separately. Altogether over 4,000 Syracusans were killed. No soldiers survived; the remaining citizens were sold into slavery, with a small number being held as prisoners. A very few managed to escape by boat to Greece.

Theodosius was with the archbishop in the cathedral when the Arabs burst in. Forced to hand over the city's treasures at the point of a sword, they were then taken to the Emir who had based himself in the old cathedral on the mainland. Later they were marched with other prisoners to gaol in Palermo. From here Theodosius wrote a letter to Archdeacon Leo, describing the events of the siege and the plight of the Syracusans. The Arabs stayed two months in Syracuse, destroying the remaining fortifications and searching the city's

churches and houses for plunder. According to Arab historians, more treasure was found in Syracuse than in any other Christian city taken in the Arab advance. When the looting was over, Syracuse was reduced to a labyrinth of ruins, without a living soul.[8]

Seven years later Theodosius, the Archbishop and other surviving Syracusans were released from gaol in Palermo. Some probably returned to their ruined city, though little is known about Syracuse after the siege. The city and the valley of Noto entered a period of desolation and de-population after the fighting. After Taormina fell in 902, the whole island was in Arab hands.

Capture by the Arabs marked the end of ancient Syracuse, which for 1,600 years had been the leading city of Sicily and for part of this time one of the leading cities of the world. In these years, she had gone from a peak of wealth and power in the Greek era to being the capital of the Roman Province of Sicily, a centre of Christianity and an outpost for Byzantium. From then on, Palermo took her place as the capital of Sicily, the centre of government and the largest city on the island.

# CHAPTER 9

## Outline to 1945

In ancient times when the Mediterranean was the centre of the civilised world, Syracuse, as the leading city of Sicily, had a major role to play. But as circumstances changed, so did the city's status. The catalyst was the Arab occupation, which shifted the capital from Syracuse to Palermo. Under the Arabs, and after them the Normans, Palermo became a major city, one of the greatest in Europe, while Messina and Catania also gained in importance. At the same time, power was beginning to move away from the Mediterranean to the countries of northern Europe, as demonstrated by the coronation in 800 of Charlemagne, King of the Franks, as Holy Roman Emperor. As Syracuse moved out of the limelight, contemporary sources became increasingly fragmented. From then on, in place of continuous narrative, we hear only of isolated events in which the city played a significant part.

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The Arabs, who ruled Sicily for 200 years, left a strong imprint upon the island. They brought with them a sophisticated culture in the arts and sciences, and once established their rule was relatively relaxed. Strict laws were introduced, but Christians and Jews were allowed to follow their religions without persecution. Many churches were, however, destroyed or turned into mosques. While isolated revolts against Arab rule took place, as well as internal conflicts amongst the Arabs, this was generally a period of relative peace. Like the Greeks, the Arabs came to Sicily to make a new life for themselves and some half million Muslims settled on the island.

These settlers brought with them new methods developed in the difficult conditions of North Africa which amounted to a revolution in agriculture, bringing big changes to the countryside to the benefit of the population. New irrigation systems were built to take advantage of the abundant fresh water in Sicily's many rivers. New crops appeared, such as cotton, silk and rice, and the hard durum wheat used to make dry pasta. Dry pasta began to be produced on a large scale and exported to the Italian mainland from farms in the north of the island. New varieties of fruit and vegetables were introduced, among them oranges and lemons, almonds and pistachios, melons and aubergines.

In addition came sugar cane and the mills for making sugar, used in the desserts for which Sicily became famous. New and more efficient techniques were applied to fishing. The practice of tuna fishing that used inter-connecting nets to drive the fish into a trap began in this period. Much of the intensive cultivation took place inside walled gardens, often decorated with fountains, which was highly praised by travellers.

The Sicilian economy picked up as links developed with the Arab colony in North Africa and its flourishing commerce. Improved agriculture led to increased exports and prosperity. For administrative purposes Sicily was divided into three provinces called the Val di Mazara (with Palermo its capital), the Val di Noto (Noto) and Val Demone (Messina), a system that was to last until the nineteenth century.

Syracuse was rebuilt and refortified by the Arabs for the city's harbour, and strategic position was too important to ignore. The Marieth Castle was built on the isthmus that joined Ortygia to the mainland on the probable site of the ancient Greek fortress, protecting the entrance to the city.

The Byzantines made one last attempt to win back Sicily from the Arabs. A large force under the command of the Byzantine Greek General George Maniaces succeeded for a time in retaking much of eastern Sicily. His force included Norman mercenaries, who were seeking their fortunes in southern Italy and who were impressed with the wealth of the countryside. During the siege of Syracuse their leader, William de Hautville, killed the Arab Emir with his lance in single combat.

Once he had taken the city, Maniaces set out to improve the fortifications, building defences on the furthest point of Ortygia, facing the harbour's entrance. When he was recalled to Constantinople in 1039, Maniaces took with him the body of Santa Lucia as a present for the empress. After his departure the Arabs rapidly re-occupied the territory. Later Maniaces fell out with the emperor and died fighting the Imperial forces in Greece in 1043.

The Normans began to establish themselves in Sicily within 30 years of Maniaces' departure. They had the support of the Pope and were encouraged by what they had seen of the island. The Norman Kingdom of Sicily began to take shape once Palermo was captured in 1071. The Normans showed tolerance towards the Arab population, agriculture continued to flourish and the Christian church was re-

established. Palermo became a prosperous, cosmopolitan city with links throughout Europe, while Messina became an important trading port.

In 1150 in the time of King Roger II, a geographer named Ibn Edrisi described a tour around Sicily, from which it is clear that Syracuse had been rebuilt and was working normally again. By then Palermo was a city of at least 100,000 inhabitants, while Syracuse probably had less than 20,000.

From Lentini a long day's march leads to Syracuse, one of the most celebrated and noble cities in the world. Citizens and foreigners of every kind go there as well as merchant travellers from all regions. She is situated on the sea, that surrounds her on all sides, while the city's gate lies to the north. It is unnecessary to describe in detail such a famous place, this illustrious city and fortress. She has two ports without equal anywhere in the world; the larger to the south, the more famous to the north. It is in Syracuse that the renowned Arethusa spring bubbles up from a rock by the sea. The markets in Syracuse are the equal of other leading cities, as are the different quarters, the palaces, the baths, the magnificent buildings, the great squares. The city's territory contains large farms, villages, fertile land and fields for crops; from here produce is exported by ship to all countries and regions. The gardens and fruit are beyond belief.[1]

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The Spanish won control of Sicily in 1282 after a popular revolt of Sicilians, known as the Sicilian Vespers, led to the massacre of French troops occupying the island. Spanish rule lasted for 400 years and had the effect of isolating Sicily from mainland Italy at a time when the Italian city states were emerging as important centres of trade, finance and culture. As a result, the new ideas that circulated in Renaissance Italy passed Sicily by. Sicily's traditional connections with Greece and North Africa were also interrupted. Spain did not send settlers to Sicily and saw the island as an overseas province to be exploited for Spanish interests, under the control of their viceroys. Sicily became dominated by Spanish policy, so that when in 1492 the Jews were expelled from Spain, Sicily had to do the same. This had serious consequences for Syracuse, whose Jewish community was substantial. The isolation and conservatism of the island was further increased by the arrival of the Spanish Inquisition.

A new threat to the Christian states of Western Europe arose in the second half of the fifteenth century. It came from the Ottoman Turks,

who in 1453 captured Constantinople and took over leadership of the Muslim world. Renamed Istanbul, the city became the centre of the Ottoman Empire, an expanding Muslim state with a strong military tradition, dedicated to continuing the holy war against Christendom. Under their ruler Suleiman I the Turks pushed the Christian states to the limits of their endurance. The clash of cultures, led by Spain and the Papacy in the west, and the Ottoman Turks in the east, dominated much of the sixteenth century.

As they expanded westwards in 1523 the Turks forced the Knights of St John out of their base on the island of Rhodes. The knights, also known as the Hospitallers, had been founded at the time of the Crusades to help sick pilgrims in the Holy Land. They had developed into a fighting order comparable to the Templars and were regarded as champions of Christendom. The core, elite fighting force came from the aristocracy of Europe, supported by mercenaries and recruits from the local population. With the backing of the Pope and Charles V of Spain, the Knights of St John held a strong position, which they exploited to the full, raiding Muslim territory and shipping to fill their treasury.

In October 1529, 12 galleys carrying the survivors of the Order sailed into the harbour at Syracuse. Here the grand master and the knights were welcomed and provided with living quarters. They had their own church in Ortygia, which can be seen today. They remained in the city for a year, until Charles V settled them in Malta, which remained their base until 1798 when they were expelled by Napoleon.

The Spanish Fortifications.

After the knights' expulsion from Rhodes, plans began to be drawn up to fortify Sicily against the Turks. Frequent raids down the Sicilian coast by Barbarossa's pirates based in North Africa made this all the more urgent. The Spanish viceroy in Sicily, Ferdinand Gonzaga, employed a skilled military engineer, an Italian named Antonio Ferramolino, to oversee construction work. Military engineers from Italy had the reputation of being the best in Europe and were in great demand as the tensions built up between east and west. In a period of 17 years Ferramolino carried out the work in Syracuse and other Sicilian cities, restoring and extending the fortifications.

The building works, which began in Syracuse in 1535, transformed the city into a fortress. In Ortygia two huge bastions were built at the northern end facing the harbours, while high walls encircled the whole promontory. Work on the isthmus joining Ortygia to the mainland was in full progress in 1542 when an earthquake struck, reducing the Marieth Castle to ruins. On its remains were built more bastions, protective walls and bridges, so that access into Ortygia could be closely controlled. During the building, quantities of gold coins were discovered leading to the place being named Montedoro. The finding of coins led historians to the conclusion that this was the location of the ancient city's mint where the state coinage was struck and stored. The city's ancient monuments, such as the Temple of Zeus, the Greek theatre and the Roman amphitheatre, as well as the nearby

Roman forum, were ransacked for portable stone to build the new fortifications, leaving the monuments stripped to their foundations.[2]

The Turks continued their advance in 1565, setting out to take Malta with a large fleet. Malta was important for its strategic position in the centre of the Mediterranean, and if it fell to the Turks, the balance of power would be radically altered in their favour. The Knights of St John, under their 70-year-old master, Jean de la Valette, rushed to improve the island's defences once news of the attack came through. They faced a vastly superior force which no state in the west felt strong enough to confront. The siege of Malta, which lasted from May to September, was an epic encounter followed by the whole of Europe. Five hundred knights, commanding a total defence force of around 8,000, faced a Turkish army of over three times their number. A series of fierce battles followed in the heat of summer, with savage fighting from both sides. The death toll was enormous. Help from the viceroy of Sicily was delayed to the last minute, when a relief fleet sailed from Syracuse. Finally the Turks, ground down by the knights' heroic defence, had to admit defeat and withdrew. It was the first check to the Ottoman advance and inspired others to join the Christian alliance. On the ravaged island a new city was built, called Valetta in honour of the grand master. The showdown between east and west came six years later at Lepanto, a huge sea battle off the coast of Greece, at which the Ottoman fleet was decisively beaten by a combined fleet of Spain, Sicily, the Papal States, Venice, Genoa and the Knights of St John.

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In October 1608, Caravaggio landed in Syracuse, having escaped from Malta. The greatest painter of the Baroque era, Caravaggio had made his name in Rome in his early 30s through some strikingly original work. In his paintings he set out to tell the truth and sweeping aside convention, showed characters drawn from Biblical stories in scenes that were both realistic and modern. Now aged 37, he was at the height of his powers. In Syracuse, he was welcomed by his friend Mario Minniti, a painter who as a boy had joined him in Rome. Minniti was now married and established in his hometown of Syracuse, with an artist's workshop employing a dozen assistants.

Caravaggio's personality had its wild side. When working in Rome, his idea of a good night out was to strap on his sword and with his friends go looking for trouble in the rougher quarters of the city. He was a practised swordsman and enjoyed a fight. Eventually this went

too far; a man was killed, and Caravaggio was sentenced to death by the Pope. Minniti, who was accused of being an accomplice, later obtained a pardon. Thanks to the help of influential friends, Caravaggio was invited to Malta by the Knights of St John, where he arrived in July 1607. At first all went well, with his paintings well received, especially *Wignacourt & Page* and *Beheading of John the Baptist*. Alof de Wignacourt, the grand master, was so pleased that he got the Pope's permission to make Caravaggio a full Knight of the Order.

Then something went badly wrong. Bellori, in his life of Caravaggio, written 65 years later, records:

But all of a sudden his turbulent nature caused him to fall out of this prosperous state and out of the Grand Master's favour, and because of a very inopportune quarrel with a most noble Knight, he was put into prison and reduced to a state of misery and fear.[3]

The knight, who was one of the senior figures in the Order, was badly wounded in the fight. Caravaggio's prison was a dungeon cut out of the rock in the Fort Sant'Angelo, from which he somehow managed to escape and find a boat large enough to take him safely to Syracuse. Wignacourt took the situation very seriously, for after his escape Caravaggio was stripped of his knighthood. How Caravaggio succeeded in escaping from such a well-guarded fortress in a port full of naval ships is a mystery. It would seem impossible without inside help.

Caravaggio was now on the run from two powerful states and desperately needed work. By good fortune, the Senate in Syracuse had begun restoration of the Basilica of Santa Lucia. Minniti was able to use his influence to obtain for Caravaggio the commission for a new altar-piece. Caravaggio worked fast on this commission, completing it for the saint's feast day on December 13. It was a vast canvas, just over four metres by three metres, entitled *Seppellimento di Santa Lucia* (Burial of Santa Lucia), and must have come as a surprise to the Senate. In place of the usual religious message, with an idealised figure of a saint ascending to heaven, Caravaggio gave them a sombre scene dominated by two huge grave diggers, with behind them a group of mourners surrounding the small body of the saint. It is a very powerful and realistic image, the aftermath of a killing, and can be seen today in its original place in the Basilica.

Caravaggio was shown around the ancient monuments by Vincenzo Mirabella. Mirabella was a scholar accomplished in Greek, Latin,

mathematics and music. Later he turned his attention to the archaeology and history of ancient Syracuse, publishing his work in 1613, in which he described the monuments in detail, supported by a series of maps. Based on the original sources of ancient writers, it was the first thorough reconstruction of the ancient Greek city and remains a fascinating work. In his book, he recalls that Caravaggio was particularly interested in one of the *latomie* (quarries), with a tall, narrow shape and strong acoustics, thought to have been used as a prison.

Having personally taken Michel Angelo of Caravaggio, that remarkable painter of our times, to see the prison, I remember him saying, prompted by his unique talent for portraying nature: "Don't you see how the Tyrant, wishing to hear what was being said, made the prison in the shape of an ear?"[4]

The name, Ear of Dionysius, is used to this day.

After completing the commission in Syracuse, Caravaggio accompanied by Minniti, moved on to Messina, a larger city where he felt safer from the agents of the Knights of Malta. Here he carried out two important commissions, *Raising of Lazarus* and *Adoration of the Shepherds*, before leaving for Palermo and in the following year, for Naples. During his stay in Naples he had to fight off attackers, when he was wounded in the face. Little is known about his final months except that after leaving Naples for Rome, where he hoped to get the Pope's pardon, he died near Porto Ercole. The cause of death is unknown and could have been typhus or revenge at the hands of the Knights of Malta.

Mario Minniti lived on in Syracuse for 30 years, becoming a businessman as well as an artist. His studio produced large numbers of paintings of varying quality, several of which can be seen today.

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In 1693 a powerful earthquake hit eastern Sicily, bringing widespread destruction. Catania was reduced to rubble and over half her population died; Noto and Modica were largely destroyed. Augusta and Lentini were badly hit and Syracuse was partially destroyed. The impact was tremendous. Coastal areas hit by giant waves were deserted as people sought refuge inland, while in the aftermath, disease and infection spread, taking more lives.

The first shocks hit Syracuse at 4.45 am on Friday, 9 January, noted a priest named Mauro Campisi. It was a night of wind and rain,

and as buildings collapsed, people were left in the dark, surrounded by the dead and injured. It seemed like the end of the world and some survivors sought priests to be baptised. Tremors hit Syracuse on three successive days, January 9, 10 and 11. Reports of the earthquake circulated across Europe, one anonymous British source giving an outline of the events in Syracuse. On 9 January many of the central buildings, including the castle, were rent in several places. On the night of 10 January a strong wind accompanied the tremors so that the great bell in one of the churches could be heard ringing continuously. People who were able to, fled the city that night. The worst damage was done on 11 January, when two-thirds of the buildings were reduced to rubble. Hundreds of people were dug out of the ruins, many with fatal injuries. Some of the wealthier citizens took refuge in the Cathedral only to meet their deaths when the stone roof and the steeple collapsed onto them.[5]

When the authorities completed their assessment of the long-term damage, the death toll in Syracuse was officially recorded as 4,000 out of a total population of 15,400. Thus nearly a quarter of the population died. The structural damage to buildings was piecemeal, leaving sections of the city and its foundations largely unharmed. Personal fortunes were lost in the destruction, with many houses, workshops and factories left in ruins. Some of the rich, taking advantage of the situation, went around buying up damaged property.

After the earthquake, Ortygia was evacuated and a shanty-town grew up on the mainland to house citizens, their shops and remaining livestock. When reconstruction began in 1696, representation was made to the authorities to allow for a permanent extension of the city onto the mainland. This was refused by the Spanish rulers, for whom the role of Syracuse was that of a fortress, closed into Ortygia. This situation remained in place, with the population below 20,000, until after the Unification of Italy in the nineteenth century.[6]

Reconstruction of the city came at a time when the Baroque style in sculpture and architecture was at its peak. It was this style that was chosen by the church, the city authorities and wealthy citizens to replace the old, austere medieval designs. The grandiose, richly decorated Baroque buildings, which spread across Ortygia, changed the face of the city forever. Similar reconstruction took place in the other cities of eastern Sicily, establishing Baroque as one of the defining characteristics of the region.

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The Napoleonic Wars brought Britain and France into conflict with each other in the Mediterranean. To protect British interests, Prime Minister William Pitt despatched a strong British fleet, and in July 1798 Nelson's ships were anchored in the Great Harbour of Syracuse. In a letter to the Hamiltons, Nelson wrote:

My Dear Friends – Thanks to your exertions, we have victualled and watered, and surely, watering at the Fountain of Arethusa, we must have victory. We shall sail with the first breeze, and be assured, I will return either crowned with laurel or covered with cypress.[7]

Leaving Syracuse, Nelson chased the French fleet bound for Egypt and defeated them at Aboukir Bay. When Napoleon's army invaded Naples, King Ferdinand, the Spanish Bourbon ruler of Naples and Sicily, escaped to Palermo on Nelson's flagship. In gratitude for the British intervention, Ferdinand gave Nelson the title of the Duke of Bronte, together with an estate on the slopes of Mount Etna, which included land, villages and a castle. Nelson was proud of his title but never saw the estate, which passed on his death to his family.

From 1806 to 1815 Sicily was a British Protectorate, receiving a subsidy in return for the British using the island as a base from which to fight the French. British troops were based on the island and their ships kept attacks from French privateers and Barbary pirates at bay. The British garrison noted that Syracuse was poorly equipped with guns for defence and that the water supply was inadequate for the population. At this time Palermo dominated Sicily, the centre of government and commerce, with a population of over 200,000 out of a total of one and a half million Sicilians.

Syracuse in 1840.

Under the terms of the Protectorate, Sicily was opened to British merchants who were charged no duty on goods sold to their troops. Benjamin Ingham and John Woodhouse made fortunes in the wine trade, the latter selling Marsala wine to Nelson's ships. Later they exported wine to America and Britain. The Whitakers inherited the Ingham fortune, with which they bought Mozia, the ancient Carthaginian base near Marsala, where they carried out important archaeological work. The Whitaker property in Palermo is now the Grand Hotel des Palmes.[8]

After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Naples was restored to Ferdinand and the British withdrew from Sicily. Malta had become British in 1800. Sicily was left in a weakened state, back under the control of the Bourbons. The period of British rule had raised hopes among Sicilians of freedom from Naples, and there were those who had wanted the British to remain. Unrest continued with social forces about to explode. The economy was depressed, exploited by absentee landlords, and with the benefits of the British subsidy gone. In Syracuse, a cholera outbreak in 1837 was followed by riots, which were brutally put down by the Bourbon administration. Worse rioting took place in 1848. The scale of civil unrest is demonstrated by the large prison built in Syracuse by the Bourbons in1854. Known as the *Carcere Borbonico*, it is now abandoned, its forbidding square shape dominating a site on the east side of Ortygia. Above the main gate can be seen the sculpture of a giant eye. It is not clear what it stands for, perhaps the authorities watching the population or the inmates looking longingly out at freedom.[9]

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On his mission to liberate Italians from foreign oppression and to create a united Italy, in the movement known as the Risorgimento, Garibaldi arrived in Sicily in May 1860. He had been encouraged by the news of social unrest and opposition to the Bourbons on the island. He landed at Marsala with his *Mille* (Thousand), a group of volunteers from northern Italy, Sicily and elsewhere, drawn from all ages and walks of life. The presence of British ships in the area may have prevented the intervention of the Bourbon navy. It was a risky venture, for Garibaldi and his *Mille* faced a Bourbon army on the island of 25,000. The first action took place outside the village of Calatafimi, located on the inland road leading to Palermo. The *Mille*, heavily outnumbered and equipped with old-fashioned guns, were

soon in trouble. Close to defeat, Nino Bixio, one of Garibaldi's chief lieutenants, suggested they withdraw. Garibaldi cried: '*Qui si fa l'Italia o si muore!*' (Here we make Italy or we die!)[10], and leading a seemingly suicidal bayonet charge uphill overcame the Bourbon troops in fierce hand-to-hand fighting.

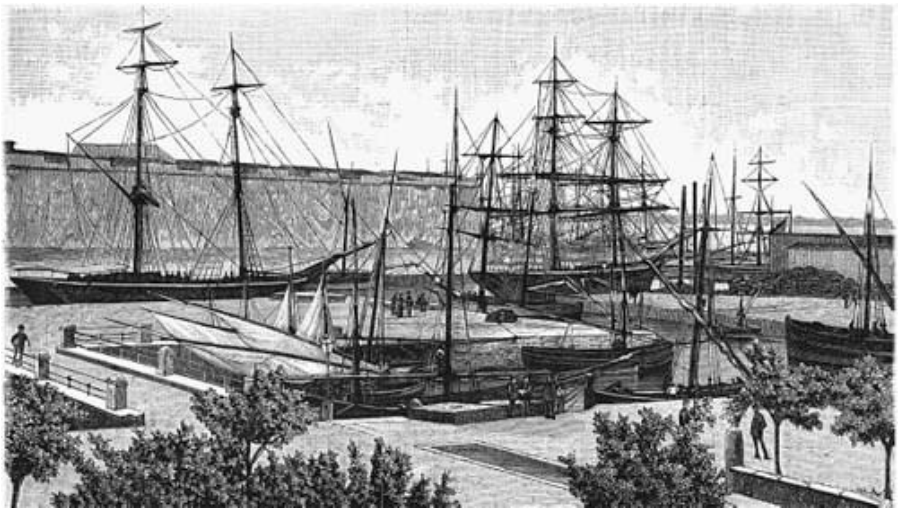
When Palermo fell in June, Garibaldi became dictator of Sicily. The Bourbon army had shown poor fighting qualities, and the King in Naples had not wanted to offend the British, who still had a presence in the city. The *Mille*, by contrast, were highly motivated and their ranks had swollen with local volunteers. Foreign adventurers with military experience commanded small units, like Colonel Dunne, an Englishman who had fought in the Crimean War. But the overriding reason for success was the leadership of Garibaldi.

For the novelist Dumas, who was in Palermo at the time, Giuseppe Garibaldi was the ideal hero, a man who could achieve practically anything. Garibaldi had strong principles and loved freedom. He felt strongly about foreign powers occupying lands that were ethnically Italian, especially since his birthplace of Nice had been ceded to the French. A man of action, instinctive and fearless, he had a mesmerising effect upon his followers. Wearing a red shirt, and sometimes a poncho, a souvenir from his revolutionary days in South America, with long hair and a beard, he made a striking figure. Sicilians saw him as a prophet, come to save them from oppression. He was, in fact, strongly anti-clerical and later came into conflict with the church in Rome. As a military commander he excelled at guerrilla rather than conventional warfare, the speed and intensity of his attacks being his most effective tactics.

Garibaldi ruled Sicily as dictator for five months. Then, after carrying out a plebiscite that voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining a united Italy, he passed control of Sicily to Cavour, the prime minister of Piedmont. Leaving Sicily for mainland Italy, he went on to liberate Naples. Syracuse was not on his route, which was visited by Nino Bixio on a recruiting drive around the island. While the process of unification would not be completed until 1871, with the addition of the Papal States, when Vittorio Emanuele was crowned king of Italy in Turin on 18 February 1861 the Risorgimento was well under way.

After unification came great changes to Syracuse. Freed from the stifling control of the Bourbon police, the city set about modernisation. The Spanish fortifications were systematically demolished, leaving little sign of the fortress that had once guarded

the entrance to the city. The high walls around Ortygia were taken down, as were the bastions facing the harbours and the huge, decorative city gates. Canals forming part of the defences were filled in. Piazza Archimede was created in Ortygia, which became a favourite meeting place. For the first time for centuries the city expanded permanently onto the mainland, with the construction of an elegant quarter around Corso Umberto. Activities in trade and commerce picked up, the railway was built, the population increased and the city once more became the provincial capital.



The Little Harbour.

The study of ancient Syracuse received a whole new impetus through the work of a talented group of archaeologists and historians. Some of the best work in this field was carried out in this period, by pioneering archaeologists such as Cavallari and Orsi, and the historians Amari, Privitera and Freeman. Many finds were made and the archaeological museum was opened, greatly enhancing the city's reputation as a cultural centre.

The name Syracuse spread to the United States in the nineteenth century. In the 1820s new villages sprung up in New York State where salt was produced. In one village a resident named John Wilkinson suggested the name Syracuse because the industry was thought to have similarities to that in Syracuse, Sicily. In 1847 Syracuse in New York State was merged with the nearby village of Salina to form the City of Syracuse, which would become famous for its university. The name was taken up by other communities across the United States, usually because of a connection with the salt industry. Small towns named Syracuse appeared in six more states, Utah, Nebraska, Kansas,

Missouri, Indiana and Ohio. Syracuse in New York State, unlike its namesake in Sicily, is famous for its snowfalls.

During the Fascist era the port of Syracuse became an important link with Italy's colonies in Africa. In the city, two significant changes were made to the layout. A modern route was opened up into Ortygia, replacing a maze of small alleyways, allowing access to vehicles. This is the modern Corso Matteotti. Overlooking and dominating the Little Harbour, a huge building was constructed with towers at the front corners, which became the post office. When Mussolini visited Syracuse in 1937 he received a rapturous welcome, demonstrating once again his ability to communicate with ordinary people. Standing in an open car, dressed in a white suit and black fez, he acknowledged the adoration of the crowd as the motorcade drove slowly through the city. People showered him with flowers from their balconies, and his speech to a packed audience in Piazza Duomo was met with emotion and delight.[11]

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During World War II, Sicily was briefly the scene of fighting between the major powers, her strategic position being once again the crucial factor. When Rommel's Afrika Corps had been defeated in North Africa, the Allies took the decision to invade Sicily at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. Churchill had for some time been promoting the idea of striking at Germany through the Mediterranean, with the aim of taking the pressure off the Russians, who were bearing the brunt of German aggression on the Eastern Front. The Allies were not yet strong enough to carry out an invasion of northern Europe. Their forces assembled in North Africa, only 150 kilometres from the Sicilian coast.

Operation Husky, as the Sicilian campaign was known, was the first assault upon Hitler's Fortress Europe. Supreme command was given to Eisenhower, with the British general, Alexander, in charge of land forces. Patton led the US Seventh Army and Montgomery the British Eighth Army. The plan was for Monty's experienced troops to move up the east coast to Messina, taking the ports of Syracuse, Augusta and Catania en route, protected on the west by the Americans, who would proceed to Palermo and join up with the British at Messina. The Allies employed half a million men in the invasion, transported by a huge fleet of 2,500 vessels. They faced a force of around 200,000 Italians and 62,000 Germans, under the command of the Italian General Alfredo Guzzoni.[12]

In advance of D Day on July 10, a two-pronged attack was launched at night by Allied airborne units on the Sicilian coast. The Americans' objective was to establish positions from which to protect the landings of their troops on the south coast. The British Airborne Division had the task of securing strategic points on the road to Syracuse. In his account of Operation Ladbroke, Colonel George Chatterton, the creator and commander of the Glider Pilot Regiment, recorded:

One of the major objectives of the operation was the bridge, Ponte Grande, which was of the utmost importance to both the British Army and the Italians who were defending Syracuse. It had been planned that six Horsas (a type of glider) should be released at 4,000 feet to land in the fields on either side of the bridge, and thus to capture the bridge from either end.[13]

The Ponte Grande Bridge over the River Anapo, just south of Syracuse, commanded the entrance to the city and was crucial for moving forward the tanks and heavy transport.

On the night, adverse weather conditions and a lack of training led to many of the gliders missing their targets and being lost at sea. Only two out of the six managed to land near the bridge but were enough to capture it, as Staff-Sergeant Galpin recalled:

Splitting up into two parties, one crossing the river and the canal to attack from the flank, and the other making a frontal attack, in a very short time we were in complete control of our objective.[14]

Demolition charges left on the bridge were removed, and during the night more members of the assault force arrived. The bridge was defended by around 80 men by 8.00 am, when the Italians mounted a strong counter-attack. A fierce battle raged, and by early afternoon the defenders were down to 15. Firstly the outlying defences were overrun and then, under heavy mortar fire, the British began to run out of ammunition and were forced to surrender. During the day British and Canadian landings had been made at Fontane Bianche, Avola and Cassibile, and the surviving defenders were marched off straight into an advancing British unit, and made their escape. The bridge was soon retaken by the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The aftermath of the battle was recorded by Captain Boucher-Giles:

The Italians, to judge by the numbers of their dead who now littered the bridge itself and its surrounds, had paid a very high price for their half hour or so of triumph.[15]

The British, too, had paid a high price, for out of 147 gliders that left Tunisia, 69 were lost at sea, drowning 252 men, together with further casualties in action on land. Chatterton himself was lucky to survive a crash landing in the sea, where he was strafed by machine gun fire as he clung to the glider with his commanding officer, Brigadier Philip Hicks. Finally after an exhausting swim they reached the coast.

Conditions in Syracuse were tense and frightening in the days leading up to the invasion. Aerial bombardments, which had been going on for months, increased in scale and intensity; in total the city experienced over 300 air alerts due to sorties by Allied aircraft, in which people died and sections of the city were demolished. Supplies of food, medicine and electricity became scarce. Residents spent their nights sheltering in the catacombs and the *ipogei,* the caves and tunnels under Piazza Duomo, of ancient Greek origin. Panels put up in the caves commemorate these events. Once the assault started, gliders were seen flying over like huge bats, some landing well off course to the north of the city. On the same night, a coastal battery of five guns at the point of Plemmirio, on the Great Harbour, was taken by the British. To the Italian defenders it looked as if they were surrounded. After the Ponte Grande was secured, the British entered Syracuse and the Great Harbour filled up with Allied shipping.

The fighting moved on to the plain before Catania where British paratroopers, sent in to take the Primosole Bridge over the Simeto River, met with stiff opposition from their German counterparts. Lt-Colonel John Frost, who later became famous at Arnhem, took part in this action. The British advance bogged down and Patton, determined to prove the American army's mettle, took Palermo and reached Messina first. Despite overwhelming superiority, the Allies failed to prevent the escape of over 100,000 Italian and German troops, plus loads of equipment, to the Italian mainland, where they continued to hold up the Allies' advance. The capture of Sicily led to the fall of Mussolini and the end of fascism in Italy.

The armistice was signed between the Allies and Italy on 3 September, near Cassibile. Wartime pill boxes, relics of the campaign, can be seen in the area. After the war a British cemetery was built on the road out of Syracuse towards Catania, which contains the bodies of 1,066 British troops who died in the campaign. The beach at Fontane Bianche, where the Scots landed, is now a well-known summer resort. The Ponte Grande, damaged by a flood of the River Anapo in 1951, was replaced, though parts of the old bridge are still

visible and the name has been retained.

The 38 days of Operation Husky left much of Sicily devastated. Palermo and Messina suffered particularly badly from bomb damage, villages inland where the fighting had passed through were partially destroyed and power supplies were interrupted. Thousands of mines were left behind by the retreating German army. As the civil authorities took control once more, they found an economy in ruins with resources largely exhausted.

# CHAPTER 10

## Modern Syracuse

Syracuse (*Siracusa* in Italian) is an ancient city now fully retired from her eventful and often violent career. The warships, the soldiers and the fortifications have all gone. In their place are the cruise ships, the visitors and the hotels, together with the trappings of international tourism. What remains unchanged is the incomparable setting. The Great Harbour, the point at Plemmirio, Ortygia, the inland waterways and the heights of Epipoli above the city are all clearly recognisable from the descriptions of the ancient writers. But unlike the Greek sites at Agrigento, Selinunte and Segesta, in Syracuse a modern city has been superimposed upon the old, with layers of civilisation laid one upon another. The advantage for the visitor is that one is staying in a living city and can explore at leisure.

The most atmospheric part of the city is the seafront around Ortygia and the harbours, at midday in the sparkling colours of the southern Mediterranean and at sunset when the boats are returning to their moorings. The Great Harbour is famous for its sunsets. As the sun goes down opposite Ortygia, the large expanse of water lights up, sometimes a brilliant orange, sometimes streaked with red, while the line of buildings facing the harbour is bathed in a pink glow. The dolphins, which featured so prominently on the ancient coins, are unfortunately no longer to be seen in the harbour.

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When the Sicilian Regional Government with a large degree of local autonomy was set up in 1947, Sicilians were at last in control of their own destiny. Central government in Rome paid Sicily a grant and financed agricultural and industrial projects through a fund, supported by the World Bank, to develop the south of the country. Reconstruction got under way. The 1950s and 1960s saw rapid expansion with a boom in residential housing, new roads and industries established and the conquest of malaria completed. There remained a lack of employment for the growing population and emigration soared, workers attracted to the expanding economies in northern Italy, Switzerland and Germany. In the post-war period some half a million Sicilians out of a total of five million left to find work elsewhere.

The discovery of oil was a major development. After Gulf Oil's find near Ragusa in 1953 and ENI's off the coast at Gela, Sicily became the centre of Italy's oil industry. New energy sources were needed to fuel the Italian miracle, as northern Italy turned itself into a modern industrial region. Four refineries were built on the island, the first at Augusta, which traded with North Africa, the Near East and Russia. The ports of Augusta, Priolo, Milazzo and Gela soon became some of the busiest in Italy, the industry developed by a partnership between foreign and northern Italian companies. Later the areas around the refineries were expanded to include plants for petrochemicals, plastics and fertilisers.[1]

On the back of these developments eastern Sicily became the economic powerhouse of the island. The economy of Syracuse was transformed, with a significant number of the working population employed in the nearby plants at Augusta and Priolo. In parallel, however, came rapid social change and the decline of traditional, artisan occupations. For centuries Ortygia had been full of small workshops making commodities such as barrels and rope, as well as being engaged in the packing and exporting of agricultural products. Photographs of pre-war Syracuse show the harbour lined with barrels to be loaded onto ships. All this disappeared in a few years.

The fishing industry, which once filled the harbours with its boats, is a good example of the readjustments that took place. From the early days Syracusans were fishing down the coast past Avola and Marzameni to the far point at Portopalo and beyond into the open sea. Conditions were favourable and brought a varied catch, from large tuna and sword-fish to sea bass and mullet, sardines, octopus, prawns and shellfish. Eels came from the Anapo and Ciane rivers on the far side of the Great Harbour. It developed into an all-year-round industry. Tuna fishing, a specialised activity that included work in processing and conserving the fish in the *tonnare*, the buildings that sprang up near the fishing grounds, provided a regular income.

A substantial fishing community built up in the city with the fishermen's quarter, known as *la Graziella*, located behind the Temple of Apollo in a maze of small streets and squares on the eastern side of Ortygia. Their properties were divided into small units and people lived cheek by jowl looking out onto a small communal square, called the *ronco*. They had their own churches and meeting places in the *osterie.* The boat builders and repairers, the *calafatari*, were based in a section of the Little Harbour known as *Ribellino*, the site of naval

dockyards for centuries, where traditional fishing boats are still being made.[2]

Fishing was badly affected by the war and continued to decline steeply in the 1950s. The remaining *tonnare* closed and the fishermen and their families emigrated en masse to Argentina. While a wide variety of fresh fish is still available at Ortygia's open market, only a handful of fishing boats is now working in Syracuse.

International travellers returned to Sicily in the 1950s. Winston Churchill visited Syracuse in 1955, staying at Hotel Politi. He passed his time in painting and in discussing plans for Churchill College to be built in his honour in Cambridge. To protect the classical sites in Neapolis, the Archaeological Park was established, covering the area where the Greek Theatre and Roman Amphitheatre are located. As tourism picked up, the performances of classical Greek plays were revived. These began in 1914, put on by a group of enthusiasts led by Count Mario Tommaso Gargallo. A body was set up to study ancient Greek drama and to arrange performances, which include the plays of Euripides, Sophocles, Aristophanes and Aeschylus. It has now become an annual festival which takes place in May and June.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s new residential districts were built to the north of the city. Slowly the modern city spread to cover much the same area as in ancient Greek times, including up the hillside towards Belvedere. This was done to accommodate the growth in population, which had reached around 110,000 compared to 70,000 in 1950. The centre became Corso Gelone, the busy shopping street that links the Foro Siracusano to the Archaeological Park. As the new districts developed, so the populations of Ortygia and the Santa Lucia quarter declined, as people moved to find more modern facilities. Ortygia's role became that of the historic centre, with its important sites, the centre of local government and the location of Catania University's archaeological faculty. It is now a destination, especially at weekends, for local residents as well as visitors.

Various symbols of the city existed in ancient times, starting with images on the coins: the head of Arethusa and *quadriga*, Pegasus the flying horse, the head of Zeus the Liberator, and in Agathocles' time, an eagle. At a later date a castle was added to images found on buildings. In the 17th century the combination of eagle and turreted castle was introduced. This is the modern Coat of Arms.

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In August 1953 an extraordinary event took place in Syracuse, which became known as the miracle of *La Madonna delle Lacrime* (Our Lady of Tears). A Syracusan woman named Antonina Iannuso, known as Antonietta, was experiencing a difficult pregnancy, during which she suffered from periods of blindness. One morning when she awoke, her sight was restored and she noticed tears falling from the eyes of an image of the Madonna that hung above the bed. Antonietta called to

her family and the news spread rapidly through the neighbourhood. A crowd assembled outside in the street, everyone wanting to have a look. On the morning of 29 August the *Madonnina*, as the image became known, shed tears six or seven times. Priests were called to witness the event and the police arrived to deal with the crowd. The tears continued until 1 September. It was decided to collect a sample of the tears for chemical testing, and accordingly a commission made up of priests and qualified chemists went to visit Antonietta. They entered the bedroom, looking for the *Madonnina*. Mons. Giuseppe Bruno described what followed:

A drawer was open, where the image was kept, covered with a white napkin; but with what emotion there was in observing that the eyes were covered with liquid!

The image was carefully dried with cotton and placed upon the mattress. We wanted to wait for the phenomenon to occur before our eyes.

I cannot describe the sentiments of both commotion and fear that invaded our hearts when after 11.00 am the image began to manifest swollen eyes, as a person taken by great emotion, and then the tears descended which, tracing the delicate face, gathered in the hollow of her hand.[3]

The sample was collected and taken to a laboratory. On 9 September it was declared to be human tears.

The news spread like wildfire across the city. More and more people collected outside Antonietta's house, hoping to witness the miracle. The normal routine of the local parish, as well as that of the Basilica of Santa Lucia, was overwhelmed by the numbers of pilgrims seeking to confess and take part in Holy Communion. Due to the huge popular interest, the *Madonnina* was put on display in Piazza Euripide, amid an emotional crowd of people, cheering and crying. The nearby street where Antonietta lived, Via degli Orti di San Giorgo, became a place of pilgrimage, thronged with visitors. Antonietta recovered her health, and over the next three months many of the pilgrims to the *Madonnina* were cured of their illnesses, from paralysis to cancer. Confirmation of the miracle came in December in a statement from the Archbishop of Palermo.

The miracle of *La Madonna delle Lacrime* was widely recognised over the next few years, including by Pope Pius XII. An international gathering in Syracuse in 1956 attracted a huge crowd, which processed from Piazza Duomo to Piazza Euripide to honour the event.

Work began in 1966 upon a sanctuary to commemorate the miracle and to provide a centre for pilgrims. In 1968 the *Madonnina* was placed in the crypt. In the presence of 5,000 people, the sanctuary was consecrated by Pope John Paul II in 1994. The tall, conical-shaped structure, which dominates part of the city's sky line, was designed to resemble a teardrop and carries on top a bronze statue of the Madonna.

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Somewhere along the line after the initial post-war growth the development of Sicily stalled, held back by lack of investment. Infrastructure was not sufficiently modernised, employment was too dependent upon local government, tourism under-performed and too many people lived precariously, without a regular income. Stretching resources even further was the arrival of desperate refugees from the Third World, seeking a new life. Discussions on a new direction for Sicily centre once again on her geographic position. The key may lie in closer co-operation with the countries of the Mediterranean region. As the nearest part of the European Union to North Africa and with easy access to the Middle East, these countries are natural partners and are already attracting substantial inward investment. According to the Sicilian historian Francesco Renda:

In this new political scenario, Sicily ceases to be marginalised, set in a sea that counts for nothing. She becomes, instead, a frontier zone, a bridge, and a meeting place. She becomes, in other words, a protagonist in a region that is playing its part in European and world affairs. We have, in fact, reclaimed a function that we had lost.[4]

Syracuse, too, has her problems. The dream of prosperity through the oil and chemical industries proved in the long run to be an illusion. Employment declined while pollution increased. Tourism, which has developed rapidly in the last ten years, is still too transitory for the city to reap the full benefits. Industrialisation has brought its side effects. Visitors are likely to notice that in some ways the modern city sits uneasily upon the ancient remains. The contrasts are too great. On the one hand are the wonderful buildings and works of art created over the centuries, and on the other is the reality of what has been done to the environment since the 1950s. Today, contending with pollution and hectic traffic is all part of the Syracusan experience.

But there are promising signs for the future. Recognition by UNESCO in 2005 as a World Heritage Site was a major step forward

and significant investments are now being made, as if the city's potential for cultural tourism has at last been recognised. The Great Harbour is being refitted as a tourist port to accommodate both large cruise ships and hundreds of smaller, private craft. It is hoped that Syracuse will take its place as one of the standard stopovers for Mediterranean cruises, while the traditional shipping links with Malta have been reinstated.

Ortygia is undergoing a period of regeneration, assisted by funds that contribute to the costs of modernisation, with the old artisan building techniques much in evidence. New residents are being attracted, among them foreigners looking for holiday homes. Districts that were once abandoned, such as la Graziella, the old fishermens' quarter, are being done up. At the Little Harbour, the post office building, long out of use, is being refurbished to become a hotel, while monuments and archaeological sites are also being worked on. Rapid developments are taking place, and the optimists are saying that in ten years' time Ortygia will be the new Capri.

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Sicily has produced many creative writers of high quality, some of whom such as Pirandello, Lampedusa and Sciascia have achieved international fame. One such writer was a Syracusan, Elio Vittorini, whose family house is commemorated at 138, Via Veneto. Born in 1908, the son of a railwayman, Vittorini spent his early life following his father around on his work, and trains remained a fascination. He had a difficult start and ran away from home several times before settling first in Gorizia, then Florence and finally in Milan. In 1927 he married Rosa, the sister of the Sicilian poet Salvatore Quasimodo, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1959. Vittorini was a communist, and in Milan his anti-fascist sympathies got him into trouble and he spent several months in prison. He greatly admired contemporary American and English writers and translated a number of them into Italian including Faulkner, Steinbeck, D.H. Lawrence and Edgar Allan Poe, while developing a simple, natural writing style of his own. International recognition came after the publication in 1941 of *Conversazione in Sicilia*, a deceptively simple story of a young man's journey to his native Sicily after a long absence, to see his mother in a remote village. Along the way he meets numerous interesting characters who describe their lives, while in the village he witnesses the pain and suffering caused by war and disease. The story is considered an allegory of the Italian condition at the time, as well as

being a fine description of life in Sicily. In 1949, in the preface to the American edition of *Conversazione*, Hemingway described Vittorini as: 'One of the very best of the new Italian writers.'

Vincenzo Consolo, another distinguished Sicilian writer, describes a journey around Sicily in the 1990s in his book *L'Olivo e l'Olivastro*. A native of the east coast near Messina, Syracuse has always been one of his favourite places. After the modern city was built in the 1970s, he finds that the debris of modern society clashes intolerably with the ancient monuments. Eloquent on Ortygia, the honey-coloured stone, the evocative sites, the myths and legends, he deplores the damage done in the industrial age. He describes Syracuse as a place of ancient pomp, power and unrivalled beauty, of prosperity, ruinous wars and sieges, in which is written, as in all cities of ancient glory, the history of human civilisation and its sunset.[5]

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The story of Syracuse is symbolised by the cathedral. It is the place where the different strands all come together. This monument has seen it all, from the original construction as a temple in Gelon's time to the looting by Verres, consecrated as a Christian Church under Byzantium, conquered and desecrated by the Arabs, rebuilt again by the Normans and finally relaunched in the eighteenth century, in its Baroque splendour. Today the cathedral remains at the heart of the city, a place of worship and a social centre. During Sunday services when sermons touch upon different aspects of contemporary life, the congregation shares the interior with streams of visitors busy with their digital cameras. The steps outside and the adjoining piazza are a popular meeting place for Syracusans and visitors alike. Occasionally the steps are used as the stage for an outdoor concert, the piazza filled with chairs and the theatrical facade with its life-sized statues forming the backdrop. Late at night the audience makes its way home envigorated by the music that has echoed around the piazza and by the richness of the architecture, floodlit against the night sky.

# PART II

# The Principal Monuments

# A Commentary

# CHAPTER 11

## The Greek Era

Ancient Syracuse with her five districts of Ortygia, Achradina, Neapolis, Tyche and Epipoli stretched from the harbour all the way up to the Epipoli Ridge, surrounded by 27 kilometres of walls. The setting of the ancient city is still clearly visible today. There is much to be seen from the Greek era, and the main archaeological sites are concentrated in three locations: Ortygia, the Archaeological Park in Neapolis on the mainland, and on the Epipoli hill. There is also the excellent archaeological museum with its large collection, for Syracuse inherited a rich patrimony from her ancient Greek past. As Douglas Sladen noted in 1901:

English people do not realise that half of the history of Greece belongs to the Sicilian Greeks, that Syracuse was a larger city than ever Athens was, and that Syracuse was once the greatest city in the world . . . . If you want to understand ancient Greece, come to Sicily.[1]

## Ortygia

Ortygia, where the city was first founded, is now the historic centre, containing most of the old buildings. An impression of Ortygia as the ancient citadel can be gained from a boat trip around the island, starting from the Umbertino Bridge, down the waterway towards the Little Harbour. In ancient times a waterway like this was the heavily guarded link to the fleet of triremes and larger warships stationed in the Little Harbour, the floor of which was marble. The castle of Dionysius I was located somewhere here, close to the Little Harbour, as was the palace of Hiero II, which later became the seat of the Roman governors. The remains of a dry dock, where ships were repaired, can be seen further round the harbour in Via dell'Arsenale. The shoreline has, however, changed significantly over the years due to rising sea levels. Through the harbour filled with rows of yachts and speedboats, the boat turns out into the Ionian Sea which borders the east side of Ortygia, the walls stretching down the coast, merging into the rocks below. Here the water is quite shallow, with huge boulders piled up along the line of the city walls, making it impossible for ships to approach. This may explain why the invaders' attacks by sea did not take place on this side of Ortygia but in the Great Harbour

where deep water extended up to the city walls. Further on, bricked up gateways in the city wall become visible, for Ortygia has a vast underground network of wells, caves and tunnels, some leading to such openings, where supplies could be brought in, or people smuggled out, in times of siege.

At the far point of Ortygia, lies the entrance of the Great Harbour, with the point of Plemmirio to the left, and the Maniace Castle, built in the thirteenth century, to the right. In ancient times the entrance to the harbour was narrower, as the sea level was lower. This was where the Syracusans blocked the harbour with chains and a line of ships, cutting off the Athenians' escape route. On the site of the Maniace Castle in the Greek era, stood a temple to the goddess Hera. The full expanse of the harbour is now visible, with the mellow stone buildings of Ortygia extending to the mainland and on the far side the green coastline curving round to meet the city. Then comes the promenade along the front with its line of ficus trees, where the yachts are moored and the coastguards have their base. The outline of the Euryalus Castle can now be seen on the low ridge above the city, with the Hyblaean Mountains beyond, showing the full extent of the ancient city.

The first Greek site in Ortygia lies through Piazza Pancali, to the right in Via XX Settembre. Discovered in 1977, this is a small but significant site containing the remains of a gate, the *Porta Urbica*, two towers and fragments of the city wall, dating from the late fifth to early fourth centuries BC. Attributed to Dionysius I, it fits with the description by Diodorus of the tyrant's defensive wall built around Ortygia early in his rule. This would have been Ortygia's inner line of defence, with the outer line being on the other side of the waterway.

At the far end of Piazza Pancali is one of the major Greek sites, the remains of the Temple of Apollo. Not much has been left standing, but it is interesting nonetheless, for it was one of the earliest large Doric temples in Sicily, probably built in the first half of the sixth century BC. It pre-dates by a few years the Temple of Olympian Zeus, which is situated on the far side of the Great Harbour. The scale of these two temples is an indication of the wealth of the city as early as the sixth century. There is some confusion over the name, for it is also referred to as the Temple of Artemis, and the answer seems to lie in the fact that the cults of Apollo and Artemis (who were twin brother and sister) were closely associated. Cicero called it the Temple of Diana, for Diana was the Roman name for Artemis. The name Cleomenes can

be seen inscribed on a step, as part of the dedication to Apollo.

Piazza Duomo contains some of the most interesting Greek remains. Once in the piazza you are faced with the powerful Baroque facade of the *Duomo* (Cathedral), an astonishing building which contains architectural styles spanning nearly 2,500 years. Despite the different styles, the interior projects an impressive sense of simplicity and tranquillity. It was built over the Temple of Athena, the most important temple in Greek Syracuse, whose Doric columns were incorporated into the Christian church both inside and in the outside wall, in Via Minerva. (Minerva was the Roman name for Athena.) Building of the temple was started by Gelon after the victory over the Carthaginians in 480 BC and it pre-dates another temple of Athena, the Parthenon in Athens, by some 30 years. In its heyday it was incredibly rich, containing statues, paintings and elaborately decorated doors, all of which were plundered by the Romans, while on the pediment stood a statue of Athena, her shield flashing in the sunlight.

To the left of the Duomo, across the entrance to Via Minerva, is the Palazzo del Senato, the town hall of Syracuse. This was an important site in Greek times and in the basement are the remains of an Ionic Temple to Athena dating from the late sixth century BC. It was probably never completed and may have been abandoned by Gelon in favour of the Doric temple described above.

On the same side as the *Duomo*, further down the piazza, is the entrance to the *Ipogeo*. This consists of a number of underground caves and tunnels originally carved out by the Greeks for the construction of wells and aqueducts, as the rock beneath Ortygia is full of freshwater springs. The tunnels, which open into large caves, run north/south and west down to the promenade by the sea. While they have been enlarged and extended over the years, and accommodated large numbers of people during the bombardments in World War II, wells from the Greek era are still visible with steps cut into the rock for access to ground level. One can imagine how useful this underground network must have been, for the water supply, for storing food and for direct access to the sea.

Facing the *Ipogeo* on the opposite side of the piazza is the building that contains the collection of ancient coins, the *Sopraintendenza ai Beni Culturali ed Ambientali.* This is a fascinating collection, for according to Kenneth Jenkins of the British Museum:

Some of the particular forms taken by the coinage among the Greeks

of Sicily . . . rank without exaggeration among the most notable works of art which we have from classical times, frequently to be found in a fine state of preservation.[2]

The collection contains coins from the other Greek cities as well as Syracuse and represents a tangible connection with the city's ancient past. As well as facilitating trade, coins were needed to pay mercenaries, who would hoard their coins and sometimes bury them in lead boxes, a sample of which with its contents is on display in the museum. Traders would hold stocks of coins from the different cities with which they did business so that they could pay in local currency.

Perhaps the greatest masterpieces were produced by a small group of engravers in Syracuse in the years following victory over the Athenians. The classic coin, or medallion, is a silver *decadrachm* (ten drachma piece) typically showing a *quadriga* (four-horse racing chariot) on the obverse (front) and the head of Arethusa surrounded by dolphins and the word *Syrakosion* (of the Syracusans) on the reverse. There are different versions of this theme, sometimes it is Athena or Persephone who is featured, and additional figures include Nike, the goddess of victory crowning the victorious chariot, and armour, representing the spoils of war, in a panel below. The engraving is detailed and sophisticated, with the figures standing out clearly as in a work of sculpture. The master engravers, who included Euainetos, Eukleidas, Phrygillos and Kimon, signed a number of their medallions, which were used principally to commemorate special events, such as victory over the Athenians. They were produced in limited numbers, and there are many beautiful examples in the collection. The same design appeared on the smaller *tetradrachms* (four drachma pieces) from 485. The iconic design of Arethusa's head surrounded by dolphins became a symbol of Syracuse, and is still produced, in terracotta, as a souvenir.

Silver *decadrachm*, possibly to commemorate victory over the Athenians.

The most famous coin of Syracuse is the *Demareteion*. Legend has it, based on the account of Diodorus, that it was struck in the time of Gelon to commemorate victory over the Carthaginians in 480 from treasure given to his wife, Demarete. The medallion previously thought to be the *Demareteion* carries a design similar to those described above and includes a rampant lion, thought to represent Carthage. The engraving is of very high quality and an example can be seen in the British Museum (one of only 18 known specimens) but not, unfortunately, in this collection. Recent research, however, indicates that this medallion is dated some 20 years after the battle of Himera. The *Demareteion* coins, as described by Diodorus, thus remain something of a mystery.

The Greek cities minted their own coins, mostly in silver, but also in gold and bronze, in units of the drachma, with designs intended to make the city of origin easily recognisable in a largely illiterate age. Syracuse used the symbols already mentioned, the *quadriga*, reflecting her aristocratic, land-owning class; the head of Arethusa, with dolphins to represent proximity to the sea; or the head of Athena in a Corinthian-style helmet and Pegasus, the mythical horse, which for Corinthians stood for freedom and democracy. The latter symbols were used particularly on the coinage introduced by Timoleon, based on the Corinthian model, of which this collection contains many fine examples. Only later did coins feature the rulers themselves rather than the cities. Agathocles was the first to put his name on a coin with the title of king, and he was also the first to use the *triskeles* (three-legged symbol of Sicily) to show that his rule covered the whole island. This practice showed the influence of the new monarchies

emerging around the Mediterranean in the times of Alexander the Great and his followers. It culminated in the rule of Hiero II, when portraits of Hiero and his wife Philistis appear separately on coins, named as king and queen.

Leaving Piazza Duomo by Via Picherali, one arrives shortly on the front, at the Arethusa Fountain. Recalling the ancient myths and early history of the city, the fountain is one of the most characteristic sites of Syracuse, set in a beautiful position facing the harbour. The myth of Arethusa and of how she was turned into the spring to escape the river god Alpheus, who followed and joined her in Ortygia, was well known in antiquity and Arethusa became a symbol of the city. Originally a freshwater spring emerging in a grotto at sea level, in ancient times it stood outside the city walls. Access was through a gate, protected by a tower, with steps up into the city. It was here, according to Livy, that the Romans were let into Ortygia at the end of the siege. In the 1500s the Spanish closed the gate, extending the city walls to include the fountain. The present structure was built in the nineteenth century, with the fountain contained in a circular pond full of fish and large white ducks and a clump of papyrus growing in the centre. Today the area around the fountain is a popular meeting place, surrounded by small shops and bars.

## *Parco Archeologico* (Archaeological Park)

The Archaeological Park lies at the top of Corso Gelone on the mainland in the old Neapolis quarter. It was established in the 1950s to contain in one supervised area a number of important classical sites. Once through the first gate, the path leads into a large open space with the sites to the left and right, the view dominated by the limestone cliffs of the quarries. The quarries are an unusual feature of Syracuse due to their sheer size, and stone in vast quantities was cut out to create them. They are called the *latomie*, a word that in its Greek, Latin and Italian form has been in continuous use since the fifth century BC. Apart from providing stone, they were also used as prisons, as we know from the ancient writers and the Athenians, among others, languished here. The *latomie* were already old when Cicero visited them in 75 BC, and he described them as follows:

You have all heard of, and most of you have seen, the Syracuse stone-quarries: an immense and splendid piece of work, carried out by kings and tyrants. The whole thing is a profound excavation in the rock carried down to an astonishing depth by the labours of many stone-

cutters; no prison more strongly barred, more completely enclosed, more securely guarded, could be constructed or imagined. Persons officially sentenced to imprisonment are brought to these quarries not only from Syracuse but from all the other towns in Sicily.[3]

Opening out of the *Latomia del Paradiso* is a cave with a very unusual shape, the walls being cut in a curve at the base, rising up to a point some 30 metres above. The chisel marks on the walls show that it was man-made. When Caravaggio saw it in 1608, he was so impressed with its exceptional acoustic qualities that he named it the Ear of Dionysius, thus starting another legend.

At the eastern end of the park is the site known as the Tomb of Archimedes. This is, however, a monument of much later date, a burial chamber of the Roman period, a *columbarium* style of tomb. Cicero, when he was visiting Syracuse, thought he had found the real tomb near the Agrigentine Gate. It was hidden by brambles, already forgotten by the Syracusans.

Now while I was taking a thorough look at everything – there is a great crowd of tombs at the Agrigentine Gates – I noticed a small column projecting a little way from the thickets, on which there was a representation of a sphere and a cylinder. I immediately told the Syracusans – their leading men were with me – that I thought that was the very thing I was looking for.[4]

The sphere and the cylinder were the subjects of one of Archimedes' most famous treatises and, according to Plutarch, Archimedes himself asked for the diagram to be put on his tomb to commemorate this work.

To the left of the path lies the Altar of Hiero II. Only the base remains of a monumental structure designed for the public celebration of sacrifices at the annual feast of Zeus the Liberator, commemorating the banishment of the tyrant Thrasybulus from Syracuse in 466 BC. It was built between 241 and 215 BC, part of Hiero's substantial public buildings programme. The altar had a rectangular structure, 200 metres long, built up on large blocks of stone, with ramps at each end up which the animals were driven.

Through a gate at the end of the path is the entrance to the *Teatro Greco* (Greek Theatre), built into the side of the Temenite Hill, which had been a sacred place since the early days of the city's foundation. Close links existed between religion and theatre, and so this was a natural site on which to build the auditorium. The theatre was the cultural centre of the city, where plays by Euripides, Sophocles and

Aeschylus were performed. With seats for 15,000 people, it was one of the large theatres of the ancient Greek world, the surrounding area decorated with marble statues and friezes. It was also the place where the assembly met, public meetings were held and political drama was enacted. What remains today is the basis of the theatre, tiers of seats cut out of the rock beneath, rising in a semi-circle facing the sea, together with the foundations of the stage. As Margaret Guido explains in her handbook on Syracuse:

There were three chief periods when drama was in its heyday in Syracuse. At the time of Hiero I Aeschylus was at the court, and Epicarmus introduced Sicilian comedy. In the time of Dionysius drama again flourished. But the theatre or theatres of these periods were probably cut away when the present larger and deeper theatre was carved out of the hillside . . . The third great period of drama was under Hiero II in Hellenistic times and there is little reason to doubt the fact that with the exception of the adaptation and spoilation of the site in Roman times, the great theatre as you see it today is a homogeneous whole designed and built in the second part of Hiero's reign, in about 230 BC.[5]

An inscription in Greek lettering can still be seen halfway up the *cavea* (auditorium), on the wall of the passageway to Queen Philistis and Queen Nereis (wife of Gelon, Hiero's son), while further remains of inscriptions that included the king can just be made out.

On the terrace above was the portico set up by Hiero II to protect spectators in bad weather, which was reached by the Street of Tombs, a narrow passageway cut out of the limestone, the walls filled with niches containing votive offerings to the gods. To the west are the remains of the Sanctuary of Apollo, an ancient site possibly dating from the seventh century BC. Thucydides mentions that early in the Athenian War the Syracusans built a wall around the sanctuary and that later in the war this location became the scene of fierce fighting. A huge bronze statue of Apollo stood here that was later carried off to Rome.

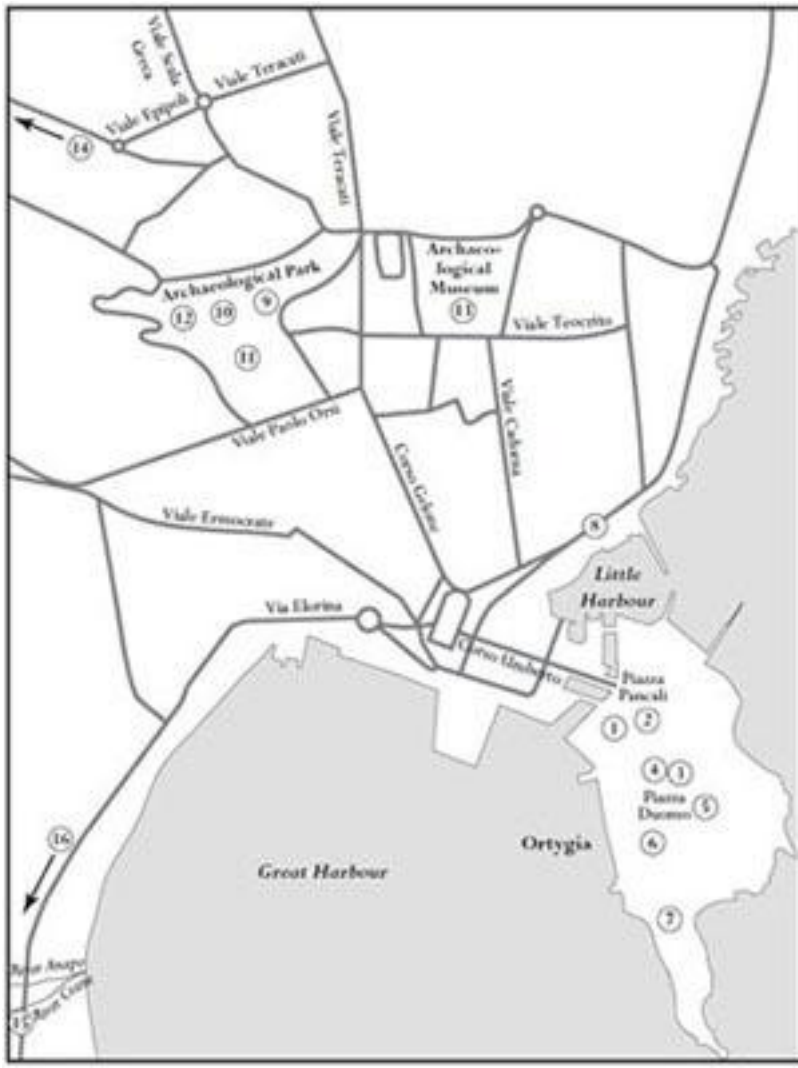
Ancient Greek plays are still performed in the theatre in an annual festival held in May and June. The theatre makes a beautiful setting on a warm evening, with the performance starting as the sun goes down. Euripides still holds his audience in plays such as Heracles, which begins with a line from Heracles' father: 'Is there anyone on earth who has not heard of me, Amphitryon of Argos, who shared his wife with Zeus?' The scene is set for Heracles' epic struggle with the

gods and his own destiny. The audience shows its appreciation with rounds of applause for the most dramatic speeches and by surrounding the stage at the end to cheer the actors.

## *Museo Archeologico Regionale*

## (Archaeological Museum)

Syracuse's archaeological museum, described as among the best of its kind in Europe by Raleigh Trevelyan in *The Companion Guide to Sicily*, is a pleasure to visit. Set in the exotic gardens of the Villa Landolina surrounded by mature palm trees, it contains a wonderful and varied collection from the Greek and Roman eras. The exhibits are accessible and well displayed in the museum's modern building. The symbol of the museum is a small bronze horse that dates from the early years of the Corinthian settlement in Syracuse, at the end of the eighth century BC.




| Site | Location |
|---|---|
| 1. Porta Urbica (Dionysius Gate) | Ortygia, Via XX Settembre |
| 2. Temple of Apollo | Ortygia, Largo XXV Luglio |
| 3. Duomo (Cathedral), Temple of Athena | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 4. Ionic Temple | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 5. Ipogeo (caves) | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 6. Coin Collection | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 7. Arethusa Fountain | Ortygia, Largo Aretusa |
| 8. Arsenale (docks) | Little Harbour, Via dell'Arsenale |

| Site | Location |
|---|---|
| 9. Latomie (quarries) | Archaeological Park |
| 10. Ear of Dionysius | Archaeological Park |
| 11. Altar of Hiero II | Archaeological Park |
| 12. Greek Theatre | Archaeological Park |
| 13. Archaeological Museum | Viale Teocrito |
| 14. Euryalus Castle | Epipoli (7 kms from centre) |
| 15. Fonte Ciane (Ciane Spring) | off Via Elorina (around Great Harbour) |
| 16. Temple of Olympian Zeus | off Via Elorina (3 kms from centre) |

Monuments of the Greek Era

The full name of the museum is the *Museo Archeologico Regionale* '*Paolo Orsi*'. Paolo Orsi was an archaeologist from northern Italy who came to Syracuse in 1886 as director of antiquities. He became one of the pioneers of archaeology in eastern Sicily and his work did much to illuminate the pre-historic and Greek eras. He excavated new sites at Megara Hyblaea and Pantalica, and within the city in Piazza Duomo, at the Greek Theatre and the Euryalus Castle. During the 45 years that

he spent in Syracuse, Orsi made a great contribution to archaeology, publishing his findings and significantly improving the knowledge of ancient times, setting a standard in research for others to follow. His work brought substantial additions to the collection then housed in Piazza Duomo, and when the new museum opened in 1988, it was named in his honour. The current museum has been developed under the direction of the archaeologist Giuseppe Voza.

The collection was increased in the 1960s following the construction of The Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Lacrime, the tall building immediately in front of the museum. In addition, when clearing the area around Piazza della Vittoria, buildings were unearthed from the fourth century BC together with the remains of a long street that probably led to Ortygia, the *via lata perpetua* described by Cicero. Thousands of pieces were found, votive objects, terracotta statuettes and the remains of a temple to Demeter and Kore.

The layout of the museum is triangular around a central core. On the ground floor, the three main sections are dedicated to the pre-historical era, to Syracuse and the other Greek colonies, and to the outposts of ancient Syracuse (Akrai, Kasmenai, Kamarina and Helorus). The centre of the building is used for special exhibitions. The first floor contains the spectacular collection of statues and the remains of monuments from Syracuse in the Hellenistic and Roman eras, including works of art that decorated the city in the golden age of Hiero II.

Among the memorable figures in the museum is a life-sized, terracotta head of a young woman with classic, regular features and tightly curled hair supporting a headdress, looking serenely straight ahead. She is one of several, similar figures dating from the fourth century BC and is associated with the cult of Demeter and Kore. There are also many beautiful, smaller statuettes of the same subject. Demeter, the earth goddess, and Kore or Persephone, her daughter and goddess of spring, were deities close to a people dependent upon the seasons for a successful harvest. A large number of these terracotta busts of outstanding artistic quality were produced in Syracuse.[6]

In their day the temples of Syracuse were massively impressive buildings, richly decorated, and some idea of their former glory can be gained from the exhibits in the museum. Models are used to demonstrate the design and construction of the Temples of Apollo and Athena and the Ionic Temple. Surviving pieces of decoration are also displayed, which include terracotta roof ornaments, some painted in

bright colours, and a restored section of lion head water spouts from the Temple of Athena in Ortygia, dating from 480 to 470 BC.

The smaller Greek cities provide many of the outstanding exhibits. They include an archaic man on a horse from Kamarina; an enigmatic, enthroned goddess from Grammichele; the headless torso of a *kouros* (young man) from Lentini and the seated figure of a mother goddess feeding two babies from Megara Hyblaea. All of these pieces date from the sixth century BC.

The principal monuments of the city have left impressive remains. From the theatre comes a caryatid, a sculpted female figure used as an architectural support, from the third century BC. While from the Euryalus Castle come three huge, spectacular lion head water spouts, dating from the fourth century BC.

Private life in ancient Syracuse is illustrated through items of jewellery, the scenes painted on vases and through the many small terracotta figures that include domestic animals. A recent exhibition featured the household, and included oil lamps, plates, cutlery, cooking pots, razors, vases, pottery with elaborate designs and sections of mosaic paving. It demonstrated a sophisticated level of domestic life.

There is one important, additional Greek piece, which is not in the museum. This is the famous Syracusan bronze ram, one of a pair found in the Maniace Castle, in the ruins of the Hellenistic king's palace. One was lost and the other ended up in the archaeological museum in Palermo (*Museo Archeologico Regionale 'Antonio Salinas'*). Goethe admired them on his visit to Palermo in 1787. It is an exceptional piece, with almost life-like detail. It dates back to around the time of Agathocles or Hiero II in the third century BC, recognised as a masterpiece of Syracusan bronzemanship.[7]

## *Castello Eurialo* (Euryalus Castle)

The Euryalus Castle is situated some seven kilometres from the centre of the city, to the north, on the western edge of the Epipoli Ridge. It is a large and fascinating site with walls, towers and underground passages, the remains of formidable fortifications dating back to the Greek era. The site is long and narrow, along the ridge, with the remains of walls disappearing down the hill to the left, including what is left of the Epipoli Gate. From the furthest point there is a view of the open sea, the harbours and Ortygia, giving an idea of the size of

the ancient city, for the walls extended from the castle right down to the harbour.

Euryalus means ‘broad nail’ in Greek, being roughly the shape of this part of the hillside, and use of the term preceded building of the castle. It appears in Thucydides in the context of the Athenian war. At one stage the Athenians ‘went straight for Epipolae at the double and made the ascent by way of Euryelus . . . .’[8] It was not fortified during the Athenian War and was a weak point in the city’s defences. During the lull in the fighting with the Carthaginians, Dionysius determined to put this right and constructed the north wall as far as the Hexaplon Gate to the east, and the basis of the Euryalus Castle, in the six years 402–397 BC. The south wall that ran down to the harbour was completed in 385. There is a detailed description in Diodorus, quoted in Part I, Chapter 3.

Dionysius I was a military innovator, and the design of the Castle revolutionised methods of defence. Employing expert engineers and architects, he introduced the concept of an active and mobile defence system that allowed the garrison to hit back at a besieging army. This was achieved by building watchtowers with permanent platforms to hold catapults capable of firing missiles a hundred metres, underground passages for moving troops safely from one sector to another and by constructing a pincer-style gate below the castle from which to make sorties to harass the enemy. The Castle’s high position meant it also acted as a look-out point for enemy ships and as a base from which to send cavalry down to prevent a landing. Dionysius thus built the Castle to be both impregnable and adapted so that the garrison could launch all manner of attacks.[9]

Construction of the castle and the walls round the city was facilitated by the abundance of stone in the area, as the whole hillside was effectively a quarry. Building high walls entirely of stone required new methods, and a technique called the chain wall was introduced (*emplekton*, in Greek, meaning plaited or interwoven). This technique involved placing an occasional long block facing inwards, to lock the wall together, anchoring the front face to the support material behind. The first known use of this technique in Sicily was by Hermocrates in Selinus, when he fortified part of the ruined city before making his ill-fated return to Syracuse. Dionysius apparently learnt the technique from him. In front of the walls and the five towers of the castle, deep ditches were dug to make the area inaccessible to siege towers and rams.

Archaeologists and historians have pored over the remains of the castle, one of the finest from ancient Greek times, and have published their findings, from Mirabella in 1613 to Cavallari in 1883, and in the early part of the twentieth century, Paolo Orsi and Luigi Mauceri. From this work, much of which makes fascinating reading, it is clear that while Dionysius built the core of the castle, additions and alterations were made at a later date, probably in the times of Timoleon, Agathocles, Pyrrhus and Hiero II. Archimedes may have played a part in the latter days of Hiero II's rule.

While the Euryalus Castle was put to some use in later periods, its heyday was in the Greek era when it played a central role in the defence of the city. From when the work under Dionysius was finished in 397 until Syracuse fell to the Romans in 212, a period of 185 years, despite major attempts, it was never taken. When the Roman General Marcellus eventually entered the city, we know from Livy that at first he saw no possibility of the Euryalus Castle being either surrendered or captured. Only when the quarters of Neapolis and Tyche had capitulated, isolating the castle, did the captain of the garrison, Philodemus, finally surrender and with a guarantee of safe passage lead his garrison out of the Castle.

## *Fonte Ciane* (Ciane Spring)

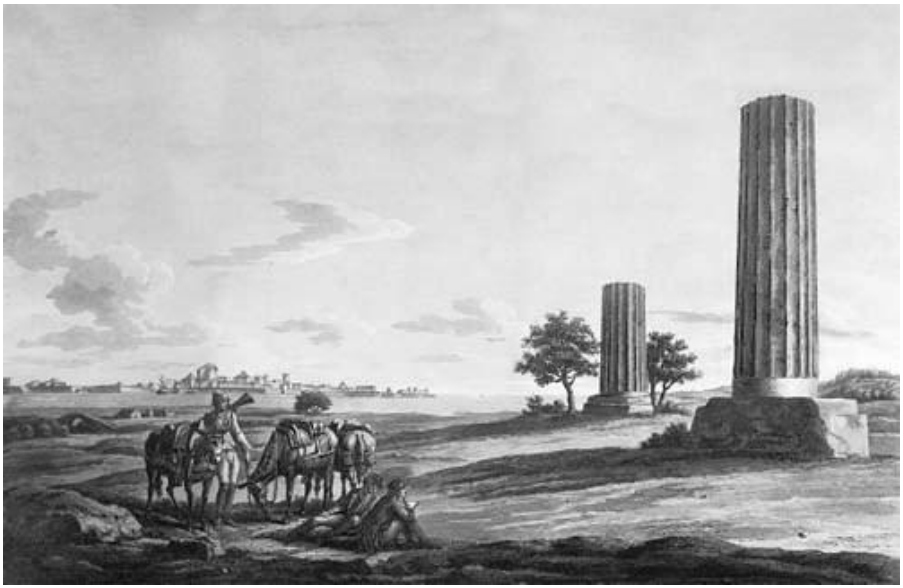
There are two interesting sites just outside the city. One of these is the Ciane River and Spring. Leaving Syracuse on the Via Elorina, in the direction of Avola and Noto, there is a bridge passing over the Ciane and Anapo rivers. On the left, just over the bridge, is a track leading to the river and from here a boat service is run, making a short journey up the Ciane to its source in a pool, the *Fonte Ciane*. The boat travels slowly up the river to the pool through clear, fast flowing water, the sunlight shaded by trees. The unusual feature of the river is the papyrus, the tufted green reed known locally as *parrucca* (wig), for the shape of its head that grows here in thick clumps. It is apparently the largest colony of *Cyperus papyrus* in Europe and, according to the *Istituto del Papiro*, was brought here from Egypt in 250 BC, a present from King Ptolemy to Hiero II, ruler of Syracuse, in recognition of their good commercial relationship. Today the river is a protected area, calm and peaceful, the home of kingfishers and dragonflies. Finally the boat arrives at the *Fonte Ciane*, a large pool of clear water surrounded by groves of papyrus. In ancient times this was a sacred place, for it was here that the goddess of spring, Persephone, was

carried down into the underworld by Hades. The nymph Ciane, a childhood friend of Persephone, was so overcome by grief that she died of crying and her tears were turned into the spring on the spot where Persephone disappeared. A festival in Ciane's name was held here in ancient times. *The Museo del Papiro*, in Viale Teocrito next to the archaeological museum, provides information on the history and use of papyrus in Syracuse.

## *Tempio di Giove Olimpico* (Temple of Olympian Zeus)

The remains of the Olympieion, or Temple to Olympian Zeus, are to be found further along the same road, to the right up a narrow lane signed to *Giove Olimpico*, opposite a left turn signed to Arenella. Only two broken columns are left standing of what was one of the earliest Doric temples in Sicily, dating probably from the first half of the sixth century BC. It was built shortly after the Temple of Apollo in central Syracuse. Situated on raised ground about halfway round the harbour, facing the harbour's entrance, the temple acted as a landmark to sailors as they approached the city.

Today the scale of the temple can be appreciated from the remains of the huge columns and the massive blocks of stone used to form the base. Ortygia and the opening of the harbour are clearly visible from the site, and it is planned to floodlight the columns so that they can be seen at night. Fragments relating to the temple have been found in tombs nearby.



Temple of Olympian Zeus in 1806.

In its heyday it was an important centre for religious and civic matters, containing a statue of Zeus and much treasure, as well as a census of the city's residents, looked after by priests who held high rank in the city. A walled settlement called Polichne grew up nearby. The land sloping down to the harbour is where the invading armies, Athenians, Carthaginians and Romans, built their camps and their defensive palisades. The harbour front where the rivers run into the sea held the marshes which were the source of the fever, malaria and plague that struck invaders and on several occasions saved the city.

## Outside Syracuse

Exploration of ancient Greek Sicily can be continued outside Syracuse at Agrigento, Selinunte and Segesta, with their wonderful temples, and at smaller sites such as Palazzolo Acreide (ancient Akrai), Lentini, Megara Hyblaea and Kamarina. The Carthaginian base at Mozia (ancient Motya) is both fascinating and atmospheric, and the archaeological museum in Palermo (*Museo Archeologico Regionale 'Antonio Salinas'*), which contains one of the original Syracusan bronze rams, should not be missed.

# CHAPTER 12

## The Roman Era

The Romans took over the Greek city and slowly adapted it to their own way of life. After the damage of the civil wars, Augustus initiated a major restoration programme with public buildings constructed in the Neapolis quarter, in what is today the Archaeological Park. They included an honorific arch, a public gymnasium next to the Altar of Hiero, and the amphitheatre for gladiatorial games. In addition, works were carried out in the forum and the Little Harbour. Further restoration and building was carried out later by the emperors Caligula and Claudius. The perimeter of Roman Syracuse under the empire was much smaller than that in Greek times, as the population had declined. The city now covered Ortygia and nearby territory on the mainland.

Only the foundations of the Roman buildings have survived, for in the sixteenth century the Spanish who ruled Sicily took all portable stone from the ancient sites to build fortifications in Ortygia, as Sicily was under severe threat from the expanding Ottoman Empire. There are two major sites to be seen today, the amphitheatre and the so-called Roman gymnasium. Other fragments exist, in particular the Roman Forum, while the Archaeological Museum contains a number of pieces of interest from the Roman era.

## *Foro Romano* (Roman Forum)

The Foro Siracusano, an area filled with gardens at the northern end of Corso Umberto, holds the remains of the Roman Forum. A short piece of portico, with three columns standing, and a stretch of paved road, is all that is left of what was once, according to Cicero, a broad marketplace with fine colonnades. Nearby there once stood a richly decorated town hall, a spacious senate house and a temple of Zeus. The remains of the portico probably date from the second century AD. The forum was the site of the ancient Greek agora where, according to Diodorus, Hermocrates was killed during his ill-fated attempt to reenter the city. One of the main gates of the ancient city, the Achradina Gate, was nearby, leading to the Elorine Road.

## *Ginnasio Romano* (Roman Gymnasium)

One of the most intriguing sites in Syracuse, this is not a gymnasium but the remains of a theatre and temple complex. When discovered in the nineteenth century it was first thought to be the Tomb of Timoleon, described by Diodorus as including a gymnasium, and the name stuck. A sign renaming the site *Piccolo Teatro Romano* (Little Roman Theatre) has recently appeared. The site, which is located not far from the forum, receives few visitors as the traffic down Via Elorina makes it an uncomfortable approach for pedestrians and there is no car park. The site has a natural setting with an expanse of grass around the ancient buildings, surrounded by a ring of mature oleanders and palm trees.

The buildings consist of three elements, a temple, a theatre and surrounding porticoes, all made from blocks of local limestone. The layout of the theatre, with its semi-circular seating can be clearly made out. This part of the site is partially flooded, possibly from wells dug at the time. The rear of the temple acted as the backdrop to the theatre. The whole complex probably dates from the first century AD, with later additions. Some of the blocks incorporate complex frieze designs, one containing a line of small lions' heads.

It may have been the sanctuary for a near-eastern deity, a number of which were popular in Syracuse, including the Syrian Atargatis and Cybele, and the Egyptian Isis and Serapis. It is thought that the Syrian influence was introduced by the slaves who were brought to eastern Sicily, while connections with Egypt go back to the time of Hiero II. According to the archaeologist Professor R.J.A. Wilson: 'What the intimacy of the theatre-temple complex at Syracuse does suggest is a mystery cult, in which spectacula formed a central part of the ritual.'[1] The theatre might thus have been used for the mystery plays and elaborate initiation ceremonies that characterised these cults. Without more work on the site, however, all this must remain speculation.

At the back of the site runs a low stone wall, presumably of Roman origin. Behind this stands a taller and much more substantial stretch of wall from the Greek era, which once may have continued down to the Achradina Gate. Down both sides of the site, partially hidden by undergrowth, lie fragments of ancient and more recent columns, pediments and statues.

## *Anfiteatro Romano* (Roman Amphitheatre)

The amphitheatre was a huge enterprise, demonstrating the

importance of the city to the Romans. Only slightly smaller than that in Verona, it was one of three built in Sicily, the others being in Catania and Termini Imerese. It was among the new buildings erected in Syracuse after the foundation of the *colonia* in 21 BC, with substantial additions made later on. The Romans also adapted the Greek theatres, including in Syracuse, to hold their gladiatorial contests and water sports. A large area was cleared in Neapolis for the construction of the amphitheatre and traces remain of an honorific arch and a broad street that led to the site.

Fights between gladiators, which appear to have originated in Etruria, began in Rome some time in the third century BC. They appealed to the Romans who had great respect for single combat, with its direct link to the mythical heroes, and which was practised by commanders such as Marcellus. The amphitheatre, with its monumental stone architecture, became a symbol of the Roman Empire and a sign of a city's status, the games actively promoted by the emperors. In his autobiography, *Res Gestae*, Augustus listed among his achievements the games given by his family in which 10,000 men fought, naval battles staged in which 3,000 men fought and hunts organised for African beasts, during which 3,500 animals died. Cicero claimed that the games were beneficial as a form of training, instilling military virtues in the population, while Seneca warned of the blood lust aroused in the crowd to witness yet another killing. According to legend, Emperor Honorius ended gladiatorial games in 404, after a monk, Telemachus, intervened in Rome protesting against the spectacle and was killed. In Rome, the effective ban came in 438.

Today the entrance leads past some ancient Greek sarcophagi and pieces of broken column, to open out into the large amphitheatre. The shape is that of two theatres put together, amphi meaning round. The superstructure has all gone, leaving the arena surrounded by the foundations of the seating and the external walls. Arches can be made out at either end, while steep steps leading to entrances to the seating are visible along the southern side. During the games the arena was covered in sand to soak up the blood. (*Harena* is Latin for sand.) The games became very popular in Syracuse in Nero's time, so that an application was made to Rome, according to Tacitus, that resulted in: 'A decree of the senate which allowed the city of Syracuse to exceed the proscribed number in their gladiatorial shows.'[2]

Wandering around on a warm day the place seems calm and peaceful, surrounded by pine and eucalyptus trees, wild flowers

growing out of the cracks in the old stone. In this tranquil setting it is difficult to bring to mind the realities of the Roman arena and the brutal performances put on to please the crowd. An earlier generation of Syracusans filled the Greek theatre to follow the plays of Euripides and the other Greek dramatists. Under Imperial Rome, performances were of a very different nature and a greater contrast between the Greek and Roman use of theatre is hard to imagine.

## *Museo Archeologico Regionale* (Archaeological Museum)

The most famous statue in the museum from Roman times is the Venus Landolina, discovered in Syracuse by Saverio Landolina in 1804. Also known as the *Venus Anadyomene*, or Rising up, this is a striking life-sized statue in marble of a naked Venus appearing from the waves, a dolphin by her side. Her head and right arm are missing. Venus was the Roman name for Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, for whom there was a sanctuary at Erice, in western Sicily. A celebrity from when she was first put on view, the statue has since attracted much praise from visitors but also some criticism. Maupassant claimed that he fell in love with her from a photograph and that she was the reason for his visit to Syracuse in 1885. Lawrence Durrell, on the other hand, who was steeped in Greek culture, found her insipid.

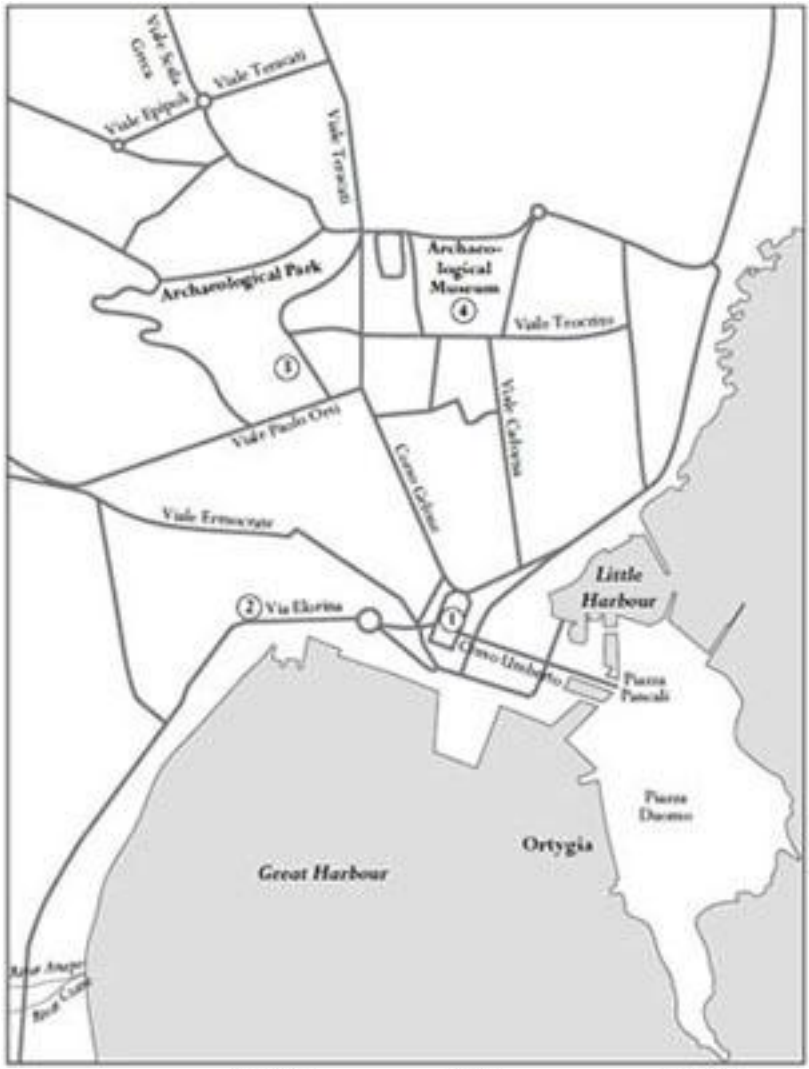
The Venus Landolina.

This kind of statue has a long history, going back to the Greek sculptor Praxiteles, who was working around 350 BC. He is credited with creating the classic nude, a youthful Aphrodite with charm and sensuality yet retaining the dignity of a goddess. The polished surface of the marble and the softness of the outline are both hallmarks of his work. The original of Praxiteles inspired many copies and imitations,

some incorporating variations of their own. The Venus Landolina is one such copy, of high quality, from the second century AD by an unknown artist.

According to Cicero, there was an original Praxiteles in Syracuse in his time, a statue of Cupid, which was one of the pieces stolen by Verres.

The Roman interest in Greek sculpture led to many copies being made in Imperial times, for which we should be thankful, for while Greek originals were mostly taken to Rome, a number of Roman copies, like the Venus Landolina, remained in Syracuse. They survived, often in pieces, buried under piles of ancient stone in sites covered in grass and undergrowth, until men like Landolina began excavating in the early nineteenth century. His collection, together with earlier finds, formed the nucleus of the Syracuse museum, which opened in Piazza Duomo in Ortygia in the 1880s, under the direction of Francesco Saverio Cavallari. It was here that Maupassant saw the Venus. Faced with the statue, Maupassant was not disappointed, noting in his journal:




| Site | Location | Site | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Roman Forum | Foro Siracusano | 3. Roman Amphitheatre | Archaeological Park |
| 2. Roman Gymnasium | Via Elorina | 4. Archaeological Museum | Viale Teocrito |

Monuments of the Roman Era

She is not the woman of the poets, the idealised woman, the divine or majestic woman, like the Venus of Milo, she is a real woman, as one loves her, as one desires her, as one wishes to embrace her.

And concluding: 'This marble form as seen in Syracuse is the human trap divined by the ancient artist, the woman who hides and reveals the mystery of life.'[3]

Another Roman copy of interest, also unearthed in the nineteenth century, this time near the amphitheatre, is the white marble head of a god, initially thought to be Zeus. The powerful face stares ahead,

framed by thick locks of hair, moustache and beard, the eyes seemingly sightless, with no pupils. The broken-off nose only increases the weathered, stoical expression. The head is now thought to have come from a full statue of Asclepius, for whom there was a temple in Syracuse. Asclepius was the Greek god of medicine and healing, the son of Apollo, to whom the sick came to be cured by the priests. Professor Wilson's opinion on the origin of the head is as follows:

In conclusion, therefore, the Syracuse head probably comes from a cult statue of Asclepios, perhaps one copied or adapted from Phyromachos' famous example at Pergamon showing the god standing (c 200/190 BC?) but made at Syracuse about a century later. It may have been the work of an itinerant Attic or Asia Minor sculptor and have stood in the Asclepieion at Syracuse which Cicero mentions, and from which Verres was to steal a statue of Asclepios' father, Apollo, in the late 70s BC. The location of the sanctuary cannot now be fixed. At some unknown period, presumably late Roman or later, the head was hacked from the body of the statue and dumped in the amphitheatre, where it escaped the lime kiln (the fate of most other marble statuary from the ancient world), lying buried and undetected until its discovery during the excavation of the building in 1834.[4]

There are relics of the visits of two emperors to Syracuse in the museum. One is a fragment of a marble bust of Caligula, from around 38 AD, the date of his last visit to the city. The other is a bust of Sabina, Hadrian's wife, from about 135 AD. The eastern deities are represented by a statue of the Egyptian god, Serapis. Other pieces from Roman times include the statue of an old fisherman, several fine, life-sized figures in togas and a collection of coins.

## Outside Syracuse

The most celebrated Roman building in Sicily is the luxurious villa at Casale, near Piazza Armerina. A mansion of spectacular wealth, it demonstrates a high level of prosperity in Roman Sicily in the fourth century AD. It contains some 50 rooms, paved with colourful mosaic flooring that incorporates detailed and imaginative designs. These include complicated hunting scenes with wild animals, an elaborate fishing expedition, various illustrations of the gods, the story of Ulysses and so on. These are powerful designs, showing great variety. The site is well laid out, done in such a way that the mosaics can be seen relatively close up from raised walk ways.

# CHAPTER 13

## The Early Christian Era

There are two major sites relating to the early Christian era, those of Santa Lucia and San Giovanni. Each site is a complex made up of three elements, catacombs, a saint's tomb and, standing above them, a church. In both cases the catacombs came first (early third century for the Lucia complex, early fourth century for S. Giovanni) followed by the tomb and the church. Other catacombs exist in the city, known as Vigna Cassia, dating from the mid-third century, but they are not currently open to the public. In the absence of documentary evidence, legends abound. Fortunately archaeology has provided a wealth of material on this era, to be seen in these sites and in the museums.

## Santa Lucia

The principal site associated with the patron saint is to be found on the far side of the Little Harbour, in the Santa Lucia quarter. It is sometimes referred to as being *extra moenia*, for originally they stood outside the city walls. Known as the *Borgata,* the quarter was built during the modernisation of Syracuse, starting at the end of the nineteenth century. At the far end of a large, tree-lined piazza stands the Basilica of Santa Lucia and the Sepulchre, a smaller building with a characteristic, octagonal-shaped upper storey. Below lie the catacombs, the oldest in Syracuse.

The Sepulchre, built over Lucia's original burial place, was added in 1629 and is dealt with in the next chapter, 'Baroque Syracuse'.

The basilica was built, according to tradition, on the site of Lucia's martyrdom, and is linked to the Sepulchre and the catacombs by an underground passage. There was first a sanctuary and then an earlier church here in Byzantine times, probably destroyed by the Arabs. The entrance gate and the lower part of the tower are Norman, restored in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the facade is from the Baroque period after the earthquake in 1693 that caused so much damage in the city. Pompeo Picherali, the architect who also worked on the cathedral, was probably responsible for this part of the restoration. A granite column in the presbytery is said to be where the saint was martyred. The most famous memorial in the basilica is Caravaggio's huge painting of the burial of Santa Lucia that hangs

above the altar. It was painted in 1608 during Caravaggio's brief stay in Syracuse, after his escape from Malta.

The catacombs, parts of which are open to the public and have been carefully restored, are the earliest in Syracuse. They date back to the early third century and were in use well before Christianity was legalised. The first excavations in the area were carried out in Greek times to make water cisterns for use in their ceramic workshops. These cisterns, which are still clearly visible, were later incorporated in a series of passage ways, off which were cut chambers with niches to act as burial places. The rock here is the soft tufo, which does not allow for wide passage ways or large open spaces. These catacombs are thus quite narrow and restricted in space, while they extend for a long way under the piazza.

In Byzantine times the catacombs were used as a place of worship, venerated for their links with the martyrs. A small chapel from this period can be seen, a round open space with paintings high up on the wall. Featured in the painting is S. Marciano and the 40 martyrs, a reference to 40 Roman soldiers who refused to renounce their Christian faith in the early fourth century, and who were put to death in a frozen lake.

## San Giovanni

The complex of San Giovanni, which is to be found close to the Archaeological Museum, is the second major site from the early Christian era. It consists of the remains of the Basilica of S. Giovanni Evangelista (St John the Evangelist), the crypt of S. Marciano, and the extensive catacombs. It began as a Christian burial site, placed well outside the city walls, and was developed after Christianity was freed by the Edict of Tolerance in 313.

The basilica, which is in ruins and has no roof, is nevertheless an attractive place, with a stretch of portico still standing, the old stone surrounded by palm trees and other vegetation. It has a long and complicated history. A church was first built here in the sixth century above the crypt. Destroyed by the Arabs, it was rebuilt in Norman times. The earthquake of 1693 destroyed the church once more, after which a smaller one was put in its place, re-utilising stone from earlier periods. Until recently it was thought to be the original cathedral of Syracuse, but for reasons of dating, this is no longer considered to be the case. Many travellers have found this a fascinating place,

including Edward Hutton, who wrote of it in the 1920s:

That church of S. Giovanni is, as it happens, by far the most interesting church in Syracuse, as it is the most picturesque. A ruin you might think as you note its broken gable, porch and beautiful rose window, and in fact what you see there is all that remains of the church of 1182.[1]

A flight of steps descends from the basilica to the crypt below. Tradition has it that the crypt was the original tomb of S. Marciano, first bishop of Syracuse, and the place of his martyrdom, after being sent by St Peter to establish the Syracusan Church. It is also claimed that St Paul preached in the crypt during his visit to the city. This is not now accepted by archaeologists, for example Agostino Amore, according to whom these claims have no historical foundation.[2] Very little is known about Marciano, except that he was bishop of Syracuse and that he is thought to have been martyred in the mid-third century. The crypt, which is dated not earlier than the fifth century, may have been built to hold his remains and relics. It consists of a small, underground church containing an altar and the presumed tomb of the saint, as well as many other items of interest, coloured paving, frescoes and carvings. Pillars were added in Norman times. The crypt is a highly atmospheric place, described by Margaret Guido as 'a palimpsest dating from Roman, Byzantine, Norman and even later periods.'[3]

Built out of solid rock, strong enough to support wide passage ways and large open spaces, the catacombs of S. Giovanni are vast. An underground city, is how Mirabella, the Syracusan archaeologist, described them in 1613. As there was no longer any need for secrecy, these catacombs were developed like a normal cemetery, using a wide variety of tombs and decorations, including family vaults. As in the Lucia catacombs, there is evidence of ancient Greek excavation that was enlarged to make the passage ways. These passages seem to lead on forever, opening out into different spaces. There are narrow corridors filled with caves cut out of the rock, each cave containing separate niches for the bodies. In other places, large, oval rooms (*rotonde*) open out, carrying names such as *Eusebius*, *Antioch* and *Adelfia*, their walls lined with burial niches. There seems to have been a hierarchy among the dead, depending upon social status, with large elaborate tombs decorated in marble for the rich and simple ones for the poor.

Thousands of people were buried here, starting soon after 313 and

continuing until the end of the fifth century. Many inscriptions have been found, most of them in Greek, confirming that this was still the main language of the city. Life expectancy seems to have been around 30 for both men and women, taking into account infant mortality, while ages of 80 and 84 were also registered here.[4]

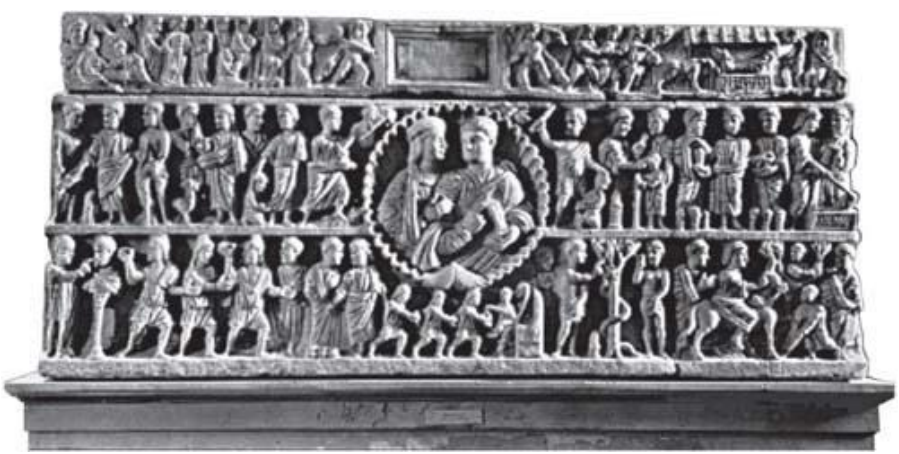
The S. Giovanni catacombs are an impressive memorial to the size and wealth of the early Christian community in Syracuse and are rivalled only by their counterparts in Rome.

## *Museo Archeologico Regionale* (Archaeological Museum)

The Archaeological Museum holds the two most important finds from the Christian era, the Euskia Tablet, with its reference to Lucia, and the Adelfia Sarcophagus, with its carvings of stories from the Bible.

The Euskia marble tablet, with its inscription in Greek, was found by Paolo Orsi in the Eusebio room of the S. Giovanni catacombs in 1894. The text reads:

Euskia the virtuous, who lived honestly and nobly for about 25 years, died on the feast day of my Lady Lucia, whom it is unnecessary to praise. Perfect, devout Christian, pleased her husband by her many graces, courteous.



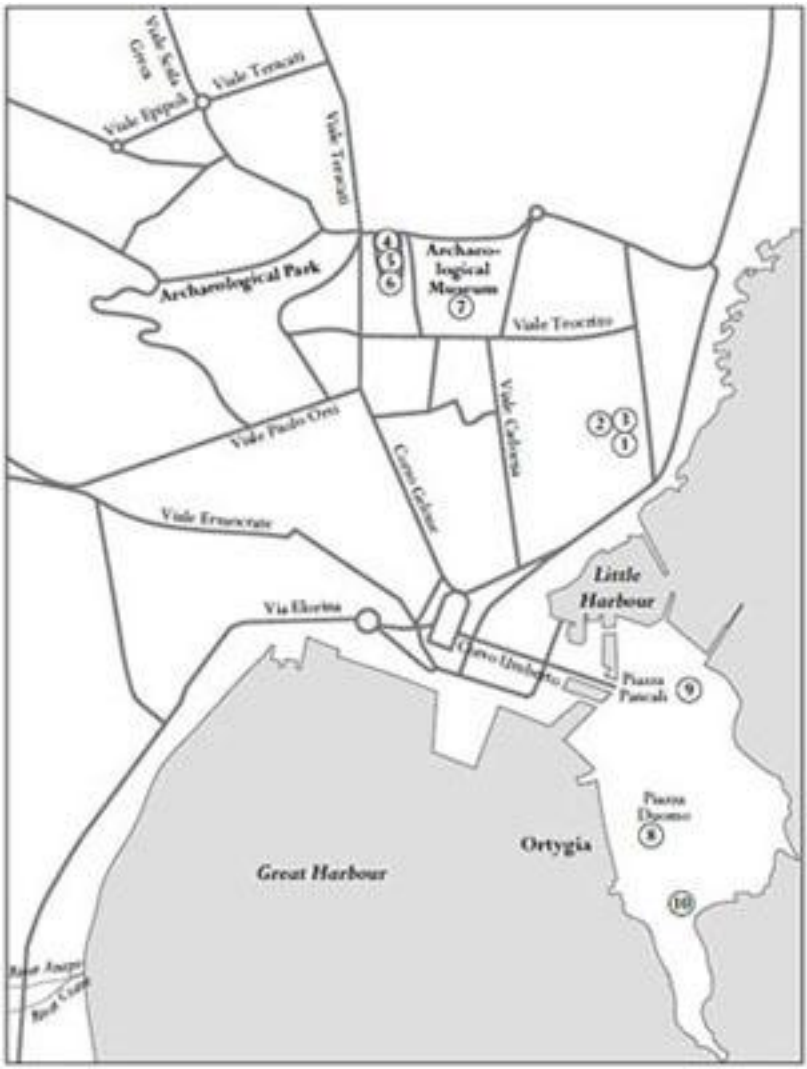
The Adelfia Sarcophagus, made in Rome in the mid-fourth century, shows the portrait of a couple and scenes from the bible.

It is the epitaph to a young woman from her husband, placed on her tomb in the catacombs. It is evidence that the cult of Santa Lucia was established in the city, with her feast day recognised, by around 400. The feast day is the day of her death, 13 December, which is also

called her *dies natalis*, or the day of her rebirth to everlasting life.[5]

The Adelfia Sarcophagus was found in 1872 by the Director of Antiquities Francesco Saverio Cavallari. It was hidden in a niche in the rock, in one of the rotonde. It is a marble casket two metres long, with biblical scenes represented on panels down the sides. These have been elaborately carved, showing a multitude of different figures. Made in Rome in the mid-fourth century, it shows Christian art beginning to explore the scriptures for suitable stories to illustrate. Christ entering Jerusalem, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and the sacrifice of Abraham are among the scenes depicted. On the front of the sarcophagus is a portrait of a married couple and the inscription, in Latin: 'Here is buried Adelfia the dearest wife of Count Valerius.' Valerius is believed to have been a member of the Senate in Syracuse.[6]

A variety of pottery lamps and fragments of frescoes from the catacombs are also on view in the museum.




| Site | Location | Site | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sepulchre of Santa Lucia | Piazza Santa Lucia | 6. Catacombs of San Giovanni | Via San Giovanni |
| 2. Basilica of Santa Lucia | Piazza Santa Lucia | 7. Archaeological Museum | Viale Teocrito |
| 3. Catacombs of Santa Lucia | Piazza Santa Lucia | 8. Duomo (Cathedral) | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 4. Basilica of San Giovanni | Via San Giovanni | 9. Church of St Peter the Apostle | Ortygia, Via San Pietro |
| 5. Crypt of San Marciano | Via San Giovanni | 10. Bellomo Regional Gallery | Ortygia, Via Capodieci |

Monuments of the Early Christian Era

## *Duomo* (Cathedral)

The Greek Temple of Athena in Ortygia was consecrated as a Christian Church towards the end of the sixth century. The tradition is that Bishop Zosimo, in the mid-seventh century, made it into the city's cathedral, dedicated to the Mother of God. Alterations were made that included moving the entrance to face west. The Greek temple had faced east, towards the modern Via Roma. Since then the cathedral

has been the centre for Christianity in the city.

Leading characters from the story of Christian Syracuse are recalled in the cathedral's collection of sacred artefacts, statues and paintings. Santa Lucia has her own chapel, and her ornate silver statue, mounted on a silver cask, is kept here. It is brought out twice a year, in May and December. The festival of Santa Lucia takes place on 13 December, after days of celebration in the cathedral, and on this day her statue is paraded through the streets to the basilica. The second celebration starts on the last Sunday in May and lasts for a week. It recalls one of Santa Lucia's miracles when in 1646 the city was saved from starvation. Statues and illustrations of Santa Lucia are sometimes accompanied by the letters VMP. They stand for Vergine, Martire, Patrona (Virgin, Martyr, Patron or Protectoress).

There are altars dedicated to S. Marciano and S. Zosimo, as well as fine paintings of the saints attributed to Antonello da Messina and his school.

The tradition of St Peter's participation in the founding of the Syracusan Church is recorded in large letters on the upper walls of the interior of the cathedral:

Ecclesia Syracusana prima divi Petri filia et prima post Antioch enam Christo dicata. (Syracusan Church the first daughter of Peter and the first after Antioch dedicated to Christ.)

These words are a quotation from Pope Leo X in 1517. This tradition, and that of St Paul preaching in Syracuse, are the subject of modern paintings situated above the choir stalls.

Additional places of interest include the Church of S. Pietro Apostolo (St Peter the Apostle), the oldest in Ortygia, dating from the second half of the fourth century. It is situated in the Graziella quarter of the city. The Bellomo Museum, which holds the city's art collection, contains a number of decorative elements from the churches in Ortygia.

# CHAPTER 14

## Baroque Syracuse

The Baroque art movement, noted for its flamboyant style in sculpture and architecture, brought very wide-reaching effects. Beginning in Rome, it swept across Europe, transforming the appearance of cities. Bernini, famous for his colonnades outside St Peter's and for his fountains, was Rome's greatest exponent. It influenced other art forms such as painting and music and spread from Southern to Northern Europe, reaching as far away as Latin America. The movement had the support of the Catholic Church which, at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, planned its reaction to the growth of Protestantism. While Protestants were wary of the use of art in their churches, Catholics saw the benefits of promoting a sacred image and embraced the new Baroque style wholeheartedly. Baroque could speak to a broad, popular audience with a strong appeal to the emotions.

Baroque found fertile soil in Sicily where it developed its own, unique style. This was due to the creativity of the local artists, to the Spanish influence and to the island's environment of strong religious belief. The art historian Anthony Blunt identified three stages in the development of Sicilian Baroque. In the first stage, a new fantasy appeared, though the style remained essentially provincial. In the second, beginning at the end of the seventeenth century, a more sophisticated style became evident, aided by artists trained in Rome. In the third, it passed from that of pupils to that of masters of their own style, examples being the churches of Rosario Galiardi in Noto, Ragusa and Modica and Andrea Palma's facade for the cathedral in Syracuse. An additional element in Sicilian Baroque was the rich decoration, epitomised by the work of Giacomo Serpotta in the oratories of Palermo.[1]

The opportunity to develop the Baroque style in eastern Sicily was provided by the earthquake of 1693. With the centres of the cities either wholly or partially destroyed, major reconstruction work was needed. This offered plenty of scope for local builders, craftsmen and architects to use their skills and to develop their own style. The construction boom that followed coincided with the peak of Baroque artistic achievement in Sicily.

In Syracuse the Baroque era began in the early seventeenth

century, around the time of Caravaggio's brief stay in the city. The second and more glorious Baroque phase came in the first half of eighteenth century. While the damage done by the earthquake was partial, it affected important, central parts of Ortygia, such as Piazza Duomo and neighbouring streets. When completed, the Baroque elements were absorbed into the existing fabric of the city, but they were so strong and theatrical and their visual appeal so immediate that they changed the atmosphere of the city's centre forever.

The Baroque sites in Syracuse are mostly located in Ortygia, together with the Santa Lucia complex on the far side of the Little Harbour.

## Ortygia

The Baroque facade of the cathedral was begun in 1728 on designs by Andrea Palma, an architect of Palermo. Tall and impressive with a number of supporting columns, it is rich in decorative elements. High in a central niche stands a statue of the Virgin Mary, accompanied on each side by a statue of the martyrs, San Marciano and Santa Lucia. Below, raised up on either side of the entrance, are statues of saints Peter and Paul. The statues are the work of Ignazio Marabitti. Recalling the days of the early Christians, the facade makes a powerful statement of the strength of the Syracusan Church. Anthony Blunt considered it 'By far the most splendid piece of ecclesiastical architecture of the period in Syracuse.'[2] A grandiose porch in keeping with the facade leads into the cathedral. While much restoration was done after the earthquake, the austerity of the interior from its Norman/Byzantine/Greek past was maintained. The contrast between the Baroque exterior and the more private and simple interior is very effective.

| Site | Location |
|---|---|
| 1. Duomo (Cathedral) | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 2. Senate House | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 3. Beneventano del Bosco Palace | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 4. Archbishop's Palace | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 5. Church of Santa Lucia alla Badia | Ortygia, Piazza Duomo |
| 6. Baroque Palaces and Houses | Ortygia, Via Maestranza, Via Maniace, Via Veneto |

| Site | Location |
|---|---|
| 7. Church of the Jesuit College | Ortygia, Via Landolina |
| 8. Church of San Filippo Neri | Ortygia, Via Veneto |
| 9. Church of Spirito Santo | Ortygia, Via Lungomare |
| 10. Sepulchre of Santa Lucia | Piazza Santa Lucia |
| 11. Basilica of Santa Lucia | Piazza Santa Lucia |
| 12. Bellomo Regional Gallery | Ortygia, Via Capodieci |

Monuments of the Baroque Era

The interior contains Baroque elements, in particular the chapel dedicated to Lucia, built in the first half of the eighteenth century. Lavishly decorated and enclosed by wrought iron gates, the chapel holds the life-sized silver statue of the saint mounted on a silver chest, commissioned by the Senate around 1600. It can only be seen on special occasions. The statue is the work of Pietro Rizzo, while the chest, with its six panels illustrating episodes from Lucia's life, is attributed to Nibilio Gagini. Both artists came from Palermo. The statue and chest make an impressive sight when paraded through the streets at Lucia's festivals, in mid-December and during the first week in May.

Many artists from the Baroque era are represented inside the cathedral, including the Syracusans Pompeo Picherali and the father-and-son team of architects, Andrea and Giovanni Vermexio. The Vermexios were responsible for the Chapel of the Sacrament and for the main altar.

The Senate House situated in Piazza Duomo on the other side of Via Minerva from the cathedral is the work of Giovanni Vermexio, completed in 1629–33. It was built to house the senate, the city's governing body, and is the modern town hall. The Vermexios came originally from Spain, and once established in Syracuse, lived near the Maniace Castle. The father, Andrea, was responsible for some fine buildings, while his son Giovanni, who showed greater ability, also became an accomplished architect, gaining considerable authority in the city. Other members of the family worked in the building trade. The site had been occupied since ancient times, and the remains of an Ionic temple dating from the sixth century BC can be seen in the basement. Vermexio provided a solid, authoritative building, more classical than innovative in style, which was not badly damaged by the earthquake. The front of the building carries a fine example of the two-headed eagle, symbol of the Spanish Empire, by Gregorio Tedeschi, who died before completing the rest of the sculptures, leaving the exterior with empty niches.

The name Vermexio is close to the word *verme*, meaning worm, from which came his nickname, *lucertola* (lizard). Accordingly, Vermexio used a lizard as his hallmark, signing some of his work in this way. One can be seen against the sky, high up on the left-hand corner of the Senate House.[3]

Opposite the Senate House stands the Beneventano del Bosco Palace, designed in its present form by Luciano Ali in 1779. An earlier building on this site housed the Knights of Malta during their stay in the city in 1529. With its spacious courtyard and ornate decoration, it is among the most impressive *palazzi* in the city.

The Archbishop's Palace, next to the cathedral in the centre of the piazza, is a Renaissance-style building attributed to Andrea Vermexio. It was built in 1618 on the order of Bishop Torres. Inside is the *Biblioteca Alagoniana*, an important library of old texts and manuscripts, set up by Bishop Alagona in 1783. A touch of colour is added by the palace gardens, which are surrounded by a wall and balustrade, containing palm trees.

Facing the garden and enclosing the south end of the piazza is the

tall facade of the Church of Santa Lucia alla Badia, completed early in the reconstruction phase after the earthquake. A fine example of Baroque style, the facade contains entwined columns reminiscent of Bernini, the Spanish coat of arms and decorative items recalling Lucia's martyrdom.

The Baroque style was also applied to private residences, the aristocracy vying with one another to build the most extravagant *palazzi*. Some of the finest, such as the Palazzo Impellizzeri, the Rizza, the Bonanno and the Spagna, can be seen in Via Maestranza, in the centre of Ortygia. Another one of note is the Palazzo Blanco in Via Maniace, attributed to the Vermexios, with its very ornate balconies. The Via Veneto that runs down the east side of Ortygia parallel to the coast contains a series of smaller Baroque residences, many incorporating the characteristic wrought iron balconies.

There are many more Baroque churches to explore, dotted around the small streets of Ortygia. Among the most interesting are the Jesuit Church near Piazza Duomo, San Filippo Neri by Giovanni Vermexio and the Church of the Spirito Santo with its facade facing the Ionian Sea, the work of Pompeo Picherali in 1727.

## The Santa Lucia complex

Caravaggio's painting, *Seppellimento di Santa Lucia* (Burial of Santa Lucia), can be seen in its original location, above the altar in the Basilica of Santa Lucia. It is one of his greatest, an authentic scene that inspires pity for Lucia, a small, broken figure in the aftermath of her martyrdom, surrounded by onlookers. The vast, dark setting harks back to the early Christian catacombs. Its brooding atmosphere may owe something to the artist's mood at the time, for he was in fear of his life from the Knights of Malta. Its realism is strikingly modern. According to Peter Robb in his biography of Caravaggio: 'This was the catacombs of Syracuse as the streets of New York.'[4]

It was painted in a hurry in two months between October and December 1608, using only a brush, for Caravaggio did not prepare his paintings with drawings. Originally Lucia's head was severed from her body, according to analysis done during restoration work. This must have been thought too extreme, and the head re-attached, showing instead the gash in her throat. For his models, as always Caravaggio used contemporary faces from around him. The gravedigger to the left is thought to be Wignacourt, the Grand Master

of the Knights of St John. Whether in revenge for throwing him out of Malta or simply that it was a face easily remembered from earlier paintings, is unknown. The man holding a handkerchief has been identified as the gaoler from *Beheading of John the Baptist*, a painting Caravaggio carried out in Malta. It is possible that other faces include Mirabella, Minniti and a self-portrait.

Mario Minniti is interesting for his connection with Caravaggio but also as a painter in his own right. A Syracusan, Minniti worked with Caravaggio in Rome and by the time of Caravaggio's arrival in Syracuse was established in the city with his own studio. His friendship with Caravaggio was important, for it was through Minniti that the commission from the senate was obtained. While not in the same league as his master, his best work shows that he did absorb some of Caravaggio's abilities. Two of Minniti's best known paintings, *Miracolo di Santa Chiara* and *Martirio di Santa Lucia*, can be seen in the Bellomo Museum, his *Quattro Incoronati* in the Church of the Carmine, and his painting of San Benedetto, in the church of the same name.

The Sepulchre, located next to the basilica, was built over Lucia's original burial place, by Giovanni Vermexio, in 1629. It was part of the work commissioned by the senate in this period to enhance the monuments to the patron saint. An ancient shrine to Sant'Agata apparently stood previously on the site. The design of the Sepulchre was complicated by limitations imposed by the military authorities. For the Spanish, Syracuse was first and foremost a fortress and it was forbidden to build walls or high structures. Vermexio solved the problem in two ways. Firstly he excavated around the site, providing access to the lower ground floor, where he built a chapel with a highly decorated exterior. This was extended above ground level, on top of which he added a simple, octagonal-shaped, second level. Despite its lack of height, even at a distance this original design stands out strikingly.

Inside, at lower ground level beneath a cupola, lies the small chapel with an altar, behind which can be seen the hole cut out of the rock which was the saint's first burial place. In front of the altar is a marble statue of the dying saint, created by Gregorio Tedeschi in 1634. It is the subject of one of Lucia's miracles, for during a siege of the city in 1735, the statue was seen to sweat.

## Outside Syracuse

Two of Caravaggio's paintings, *Resurrezione di Lazzaro* (Raising of Lazarus) and *Adorazione dei Pastori* (Adoration of the Shepherds), done in Messina after leaving Syracuse, can be seen in Messina's *Museo Regionale.* His *Natività con i Santi Lorenzo e Francesco* (Nativity with St Lawrence and St Francis), painted and originally kept in Palermo, was stolen in 1969.

There are plenty of examples of Sicilian Baroque to be seen across the island. Some of the finest can be found in the Baroque valley from Syracuse to the hilltowns of the south-eastern corner. Thanks to Baroque, Noto, Ragusa and Modica, together with Ortygia in Syracuse, contain some of the most spectacular urban landscapes of anywhere in the world.

# CHAPTER 15

# Other Important Monuments

## *Santuario della Madonna delle Lacrime*

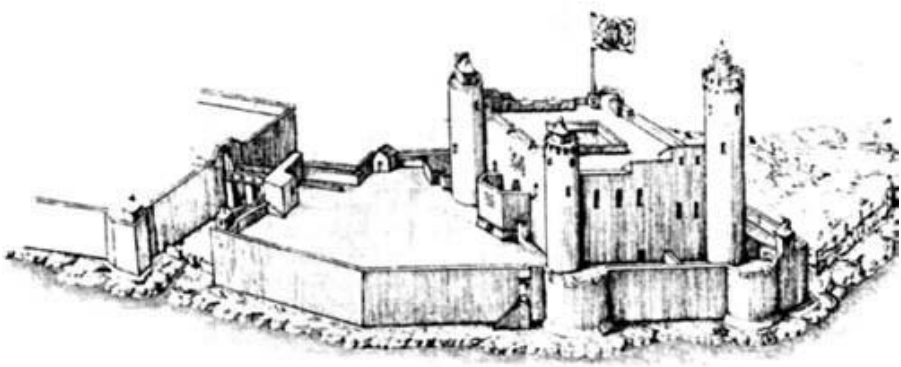
## (Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tears)

The sanctuary, which is a major landmark of Syracuse, stands in its own grounds on Viale Teocrito opposite the Archaeological Museum. Its tall, unmistakable conical shape built in reinforced concrete, which stands 75 metres high, was designed by the French architects Michel Andrault and Pierre Parat to resemble a teardrop. For the sanctuary commemorates the occasion when in 1953 an image of the Madonna shed tears. (For the story of this event see Part I, Chapter 10.) The miracle was widely recognised, and the sanctuary, opened by Pope John Paul II in 1994, has since attracted many pilgrims.

The immense, circular interior contains a number of chapels named after the saints from the early history of the Syracusan Church, Peter, Paul, Lucia and Agata. Above the altar hangs the *Madonnina,* the image of the Madonna that cried. Beneath the main hall lies the crypt, built over ancient remains, and above one of the main entrances hangs a sign containing pictures of the Madonna and Santa Lucia, linking the modern to past miracles, with the inscription: 'Due donne che parlano con gli occhi' (two women who speak with their eyes).

## *Castello Maniace* (Maniace Castle)

The Maniace Castle occupies the southern-most point of Ortygia and dominates the harbour's entrance. It is a pleasure to visit for its unique position and its combination of gates, bridges, central palace and defences overlooking the sea. The tradition is that a temple to the goddess Hera stood here in ancient Greek times, and possibly also a palace. According to Cicero, the Roman Governor Verres made his summer camp here. The name comes from the Byzantine Greek General George Maniaces, who recaptured Syracuse from the Arabs in the 1030s and who fortified the area.



The Maniace Castle, 1630.

The present site consists of two elements, a fortified palace built by Frederick II in the thirteenth century, and fortifications on either side of the palace added by the Spanish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The castle was one of several built by Frederick II to defend eastern Sicily. Similar castles can be seen in Augusta and Catania and the remains of a tower at Vendicari.

The fortified palace is entered through a highly decorative Gothic arch, on either side of which once stood a bronze ram, relics of ancient Greek days. One has survived and can be seen in the archaeological museum in Palermo. The palace is built in a great square with circular towers at each corner and contains a spectacular central hall with a vaulted ceiling, decorated with various sculptured figures, lions, serpents and human heads.

Through the palace is a second gate that leads to low-lying fortifications added later by the Spanish. They face out to sea with gun emplacements and fit neatly onto the contours of the rocks beneath. The fortifications are on two levels, with quarters for the garrison and a prison on ground level.[1]

## *Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Bellomo*

## (The Bellomo Regional Gallery)

The Bellomo Gallery, located in Via Capodieci in Ortygia a few minutes from the Arethusa Fountain, is of interest for the architecture of the building as well as for its collection. The Palazzo Bellomo, with its forbidding exterior, was built in the thirteenth century in the same period as the Maniace Castle. The owners of the building, the Bellomo, a powerful Syracusan family, extended it in the fifteenth century. The palazzo is especially attractive for its vaulted ceilings and the spacious

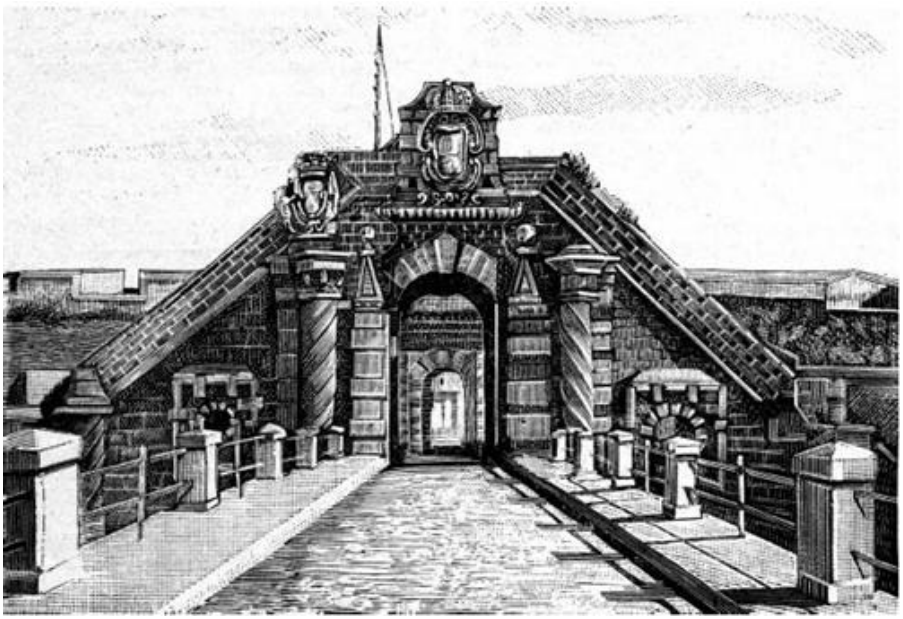
courtyard with its grand open staircase.

The collection consists of sculpture, paintings and ceramics from the Byzantine period to the eighteenth century, most of which came from the convents and churches of Syracuse and surrounding area. Of particular note are the paintings by Mario Minniti, Caravaggio's companion, the *Martyrdom of Santa Lucia* and the *Miracle of Santa Chiara*; and the *Annunciation* by Antonello da Messina; some fine altarpieces and a statue of the *Madonna and Child* by Domenico Gagini.

## *Bagno Ebraico* (Jewish Baths)

Like many ports in the Mediterranean, Syracuse had a sizeable Jewish community dating back to Roman times. By the fifteenth century it may have been as large as one-third of the total population of 10,000. The Jewish Quarter was the Giudecca, situated to the east of Piazza Duomo, running off Via della Giudecca. The synagogue stood on the site now filled by the Church of San Filippo Apostolo (St Philip the Apostle). When Ferdinand, King of Spain, expelled the Jews from Spanish territory in 1492, Sicily was forced to comply and they were given the choice of exile or conversion to Christianity.

A lasting monument to the Jewish community is their underground baths. Fed by underground freshwater springs a number of baths were cut out of the rock deep below ground level, with caves carved out to accommodate them. They were used for ritual cleansing and date from the Byzantine era. Access, by steep descent on steps cut out of the rock, is available on request in Via Alagona.



The Ligne Gate.

## *Porticciolo Ribellino* (Ribellino Port)

The Ribellino Port, also known as the *Darsena Montedoro*, is a small section of the Little Harbour bordered on one side by Via Moscuzza. It is approached by crossing the Umbertino Bridge towards Corso Umberto and turning right. It is all that remains of the Spanish fortifications that once covered this district. Since ancient times the isthmus between Ortygia and the *agora* or forum (the modern Foro Siracusano) was heavily fortified. The Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Spanish all had castles here, protecting access to Ortygia. The Spanish added a second canal to the north and a fortress, the *Piazzaforte*, in the middle. At the end of the nineteenth century the Spanish fortifications were dismantled, and the second canal filled in, making way for the construction of Corso Umberto and surrounding streets. Fortunately the monumental Ligne Gate, named after a Spanish Viceroy, was photographed before being removed.

Down one side of the Ribellino Port runs a stretch of Spanish wall from the sixteenth century. A cornice runs down the centre, while steps can be seen cut into the stone, and there are gaps opening into the buildings above. Once a busy part of the harbour this is a fascinating area with strong echoes of the past, which once cleaned up will be one of the treasures of Syracuse. For some time it has been abandoned, silted up, full of sunken boats and refuse of all kinds. A

working boatyard, still making traditional wooden boats, occupies space next to the port.[2]

| Site | Location | Site | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tears | Viale Teocrito | 4. Jewish Baths | Ortygia, Via Alagone |
| 2. Maniace Castle | Ortygia, furthest point | 5. Ribellino Port | Little Harbour, Via Moscuzza |
| 3. Bellomo Regional Gallery | Ortygia, Via Capodieci | 6. Porta Marina | Ortygia, Great Harbour |

## Other Important Monuments

More remains of the Spanish fortifications can be seen on the front by the Great Harbour. The best preserved is the *Porta Marina*, the entrance to Via Ruggero Settimo which leads up into Ortygia from the harbour. Further down the front, behind the line of well-tailored ficus trees, can be seen more sections of the Spanish wall, part of which contains the decorative *Fontana degli Schiavi* (Fountain of the Slaves).

# Notes

## Prologue

1. Andrea Camilleri website, www.andreacamilleri.net, Sicilia.

2. Printed with the permission of Eva Greco, Tour Guide, Syracuse.

3. George Russell, *A Tour through Sicily in the Year 1815* (Sherwood, Neely & Jones, London, 1819) p. 189.

4. Guy de Maupassant, *La Vie Errante* (Paul Ollendorff, Editeur, Paris, 1890) p. 115, author's translation.

5. Douglas Sladen, *In Sicily* (Sands & Co, London, 1901) Vol. 1, p. 148. Sladen, who travelled the world, was much taken with Sicily, which he visited in 1896, 1898 and 1900. His descriptions of the monuments of Syracuse remain among the most evocative.

6. Edward Hutton, *Cities of Sicily* (Methuen & Co Ltd, London, 1926) p. 94.

7. UNESCO World Heritage website (whc.unesco.org) under *Syracuse*, Advisory Body Evaluation, p. 133.

# Chapter 1: Foundation and the Rule of Gelon and Hiero I

1. Homer, *The Odyssey* (Penguin Classics, 1946, translated by Martin Hammond) Book IX, p. 142. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

2. Strabo, *Geography* (Loeb Classical Library Volume 182, Harvard University Press, 1924, translated by Horace L Jones) Vol. III, Book VI, Chapter 2, p. 73. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

3. Empedocle, the philosopher, quoted in Giuseppe Di Giovanni's *Selinunte* (Editions Di Giovanni, Agrigento, 1991) p. 5.

4. F. Saverio Cavallari & A. Holm, *Topografia Archeologica di Siracusa* (Palermo, 1883) p. 181: 'not less than 200,000, probably more', author's translation.

5. Herodotus, *The Histories* (Penguin Classics, 1954, translated by Aubrey de Selincourt) Book VII, p. 157. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

6. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (Loeb Classical Library Volume 375, Harvard University Press, 1946, translated by C. H. Oldfather) Book XI, p. 181. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Diodorus, a Sicilian Greek, wrote the only continuous history of Sicily in ancient times between 60 and 30 BC. It was based on numerous contemporary writers, some of them participants in the events described. He is one of the most important sources on Greek Syracuse.

7. Ibid., Book XI, 51, p. 257.

8. Pindar, *The Odes* (Penguin Classics, 1969, translated by C. M Bowra) Olympian I, p. 65. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

9. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Book XI, p. 299.

## Chapter 2: The Athenian Expedition to Sicily

1. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Penguin Classics, 1972 edition, translated by Rex Warner) Book 6, p. 422. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd. Thucydides, who was exiled from Athens in 424 for failing on an assignment during the war, based his history on personal accounts, some from eye witnesses, which he cross-checked for accuracy. It is thought likely that Books 6 and 7 were written soon after the events described. Thucydides is the main source for this chapter, supported by Plutarch's lives of Alcibiades and Nicias.

2. Ibid., p. 417.

3. Ibid., p. 417.

4. Ibid., Book 7, p. 494. *Syracuse, a city which was in itself as big as Athens.* Plutarch, *The Rise and Fall of Athens, the Life of Nicias* (Penguin Classics) p. 228, makes a similar comparison. The population estimate of 300,000, covering the city and nearby territory, is confirmed by P. Biago, *Urbanistica di Siracusa Antica*, p. 33 and in *Syracuse*, published by the Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri, 1931.

5. Prof. M. I. Finley, *Ancient Sicily* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1979) p. 69. An authoritative, analytical history of ancient Sicily and an important point of reference.

6. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Penguin Classics, 1972 edition, translated by Rex Warner) Book 6, p. 430. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

7. Ibid., p. 455.

8. Ibid., p. 468.

9. Ibid., Book 7, p. 484.

10. Ibid., p. 536. It is possible that Thucydides met Hermocrates when they were both in exile. It would explain Thucydides' detailed knowledge of the siege and his positive portrayal of the Syracusan general.

## Chapter 3: Dionysius I: Tyrant and Warlord

1. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (Aris & Phillips, Warminster 1990, translated by A. E. Douglas) Vol. V, p. 111. For the full story of Dionysius see Edward Freeman, *History of Sicily* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1894, reprinted by Elibron Classics) Vol. IV, pp. 1–238, and Brian Caven, *Dionysius I: War-Lord of Sicily* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990).

2. Ibid., p. 113.

3. Ibid., p. 111.

4. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 375, Harvard University Press, 1946, translated by C. H. Oldfather) Book X, 4, p. 57.

5. Ibid. (1950), Book XIII, 75, p. 333.

6. Ibid. (1954), Book XIV, 7, p. 25. The location of Dionysius' fortress (*la Rocca*) is thought to have been on the isthmus that joined Ortygia to the mainland, a stretch of land bordering both harbours. This was the view of Serafino Privitera, the nineteenth-century historian of Syracuse, see *Storia di Siracusa: antica e moderna* (Napoli, 1878) p. 185. Edward Freeman came to the same conclusion (*History of Sicily*, Vol IV, p. 11).

7. Ibid., Book XIV, 7, p. 27.

8. Ibid., Book XIV, 8, p. 31.

9. Ibid., Book XIV, 18, p. 59. Diodorus may have based his description of Dionysius' preparations for war and his defences of Syracuse on the work of Philistus, an eye witness to these events. Philistus' history, written later while in exile and much admired at the time, was subsequently lost.

10. Ibid., Book XIV, 18, p. 61.

11. Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander, Life of Dion* (Penguin Classics, 1973, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 105. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

12. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 399, Harvard University Press, 1954, translated by C. H. Oldfather) Book XIV, p. 183.

13. Ibid., Book XIV, 65, p. 191.

14. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1990, translated by A. E. Douglas) Vol. V, p. 111.

15. Plato, *Seventh Letter, to the Relatives and Friends of Dion* (University of Pennsylvania, www.upenn.edu, translated by J. Hardward) p. 2.

16. Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander, Life of Dion* (Penguin Classics, 1973, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 107. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

## Chapter 4: Five More Tyrants

1. Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander, Life of Dion* (Penguin Classic, 1973, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 109. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

2. Ibid., p. 118.

3. Ibid., p. 119.

4. Ibid., p. 126.

5. Plato, *Seventh Letter, to the Relatives and Friends of Dion* (University of Pennsylvania, www.upenn.edu translated by J. Hardward) p. 15.

6. Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander, Life of Timoleon* (Penguin Classics, 1973, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 164. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

7. Ibid., p. 169.

8. Ibid., p. 171.

9. Ibid., p. 171.

10. Ibid., p. 177.

11. Ibid., p. 187.

12. Diodorus, *Library of History* (Leob Classical Library, Volume 409, Harvard University Press, 1957, translated by Francis R. Walton) Book XXI, p. 29. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

13. Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander, Life of Pyrrhus* (Penguin Classics, 1973, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 399. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

14. Ibid., p. 409.

15. Ibid., p. 412.

## Chapter 5: Hiero II and the Roman Siege

1. Polybius, *The Histories* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 138, Harvard University Press, 1923, translated by W. R. Paton) Volume III, Book VII, p. 419. A Greek historian writing around 140 BC. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

2. Ibid., Book VIII, p. 453.

3. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 208, Harvard University Press, 1928, translated by Charles Burton Gulick) Vol. II, Book III, p. 47. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

4. Ibid., p. 47.

5. Cicero, *The Verrine Orations II* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 293, Harvard University Press 1935, translated by LHG Greenwood) p. 431. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

6. Theocritus, *The Idylls* (Carcanet Press Limited, Manchester, 1988, translated by Robert Wells) Vol. 16, p. 109.

7. Ibid., *For a Statue of Epicarmus*, p. 138.

8. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Life of Marcellus* (Penguin Classics, 1965, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 102. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

9. Ibid., p. 99.

10. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, Book V, p. 435.

11. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Life of Marcellus* (Penguin Classics, 1965, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 93. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

12. Polybius, *The Histories*, Book VIII, p. 457.

13. Ibid., p. 457.

14. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Life of Marcellus*, p. 100.

15. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 409, Harvard University Press, 1957, translated by Francis R. Walton) Book XXVI, p. 195. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of

the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

16. Polybius, *The Histories*, Book VIII, p. 461.

17. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Life of Marcellus*, p. 101.

18. Livy, *Hannibal's War* (Oxford World's Classics, 2006, translated by J. C. Yardley) Book 25, p. 285. By permission of Oxford University Press. Livy, a Roman historian writing around 30 BC, provides the most complete account of the Roman siege.

19. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Life of Marcellus*, p. 103.

20. Livy, *Hannibal's War*, Book 25, p. 295.

21. Ibid., p. 295.

22. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Life of Marcellus*, p. 104.

23. Livy, *Hannibal's War*, Book 25, p. 295.

24. www.archimedespalimsest.org; Reviel Netz & William Noel, *The Archimedes Codex* (Phoenix, London, 2008).

## Chapter 6: Cicero and the Rise of Rome

1. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 409, Harvard University Press, 1957, translated by Francis R. Walton) Book XXVI, p. 197. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

2. Livy, *Hannibal's War* (Oxford World Classics 2006, translated by J. C. Yardley) Book 26, p. 337. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

3. Ibid., Book 26, p. 349.

4. Ibid., Book 26, p. 351.

5. Ibid., Book 29, p. 515.

6. Ibid., Book 29, p. 539.

7. Ibid., Book 30, p. 600.

8. Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (Penguin Classics, 1969, translated by Robin Campbell) Letter LXXXVI, p. 145. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

9. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome, Cato the Elder* (Penguin Classics, 1956, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert) p. 150. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

10. Polybius, *The Histories* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 161, Harvard University Press, 1927, translated by W. R. Paton) Book XXXVIII, p. 439. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

11. Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic, Cicero* (Penguin Classics, 1958, translated by Rex Warner) p. 300. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

12. Ibid., p. 299.

13. Cicero, *The Verrine Orations II* (Loeb Classical Library, Volume 293, Harvard University Press, 1935, translated by LHG Greenwood) p. 427. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

14. Ibid., p. 501.

15. Prof M. I. Finley, *Ancient Sicily* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1979) p. 133.

16. Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic, Cicero*, p. 319.

17. Virgil, *The Aeneid* (Collector's Library, 2004, translated by J. W. Mackail) Book 3, p. 81.

## Chapter 7: Santa Lucia and the Early Christians

1. The sacking of Syracuse in 278 is recorded in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Oxford University Press, 1925) Vol. 1, p. 377.

2. *Acts of the Apostles*, 28.12.

3. Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (Romeo Prampolini Editore Catania, 1933) Vol. I, Chapter II, p. 119. *Tracce sicure del cristianesimo in Sicilia non si hanno prima della fine del II o del principio del III secolo.* There is no clear evidence of Christianity in Sicily before the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. Comment specifically on Syracuse is made by: M. I. Finley, *Ancient Sicily*, p. 170 and R. J. A. Wilson, *Sicily under the Roman Empire*, p. 301. Concerning St Paul's visit, Syracuse was a port of call on the shipping route from Malta to Rhegium, on the way to Rome. While *The Acts* records that Paul met people on his travels in Athens, Corinth and other cities, there is no mention of any contact being made in Syracuse. For the crypt, see Agostino Amore's *San Marciano di Siracusa.*

4. The account of Santa Lucia's martyrdom is based upon the Papadopuolos Codex. Quotes come from the complete text that appears in Domenico Gaspare Lancia di Brolo's *Storia della Chiesa in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1880) pp. 160–5; author's translation.

5. If Lucia had been distributing goods to the poor for three years, then her visit to Catania took place in 301. This was before Diocletian's first edict in 303, when Christian worship was still legal.

6. According to the Papadopoulos Codex, Lucia was killed with a sword. In the Latin version, she died by a dagger blow to the throat, which became the accepted story, reflected in her statue, which is paraded through the streets. Decapitation, the usual form of execution for Roman citizens, was confirmed by the remains of her body.

7. La Parrocchia Santa Lucia al Sepolcro, *La vita ed il martirio di S. Lucia* (Grafia Saturnia, Siracusa, 2006) p. 12.

8. Eusebius, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine,* Book 3, Chapter 10. For Constantine and the early history of Byzantium, see John Julius Norwich's *Byzantium, The Early Centuries* (Penguin Books, London, 1990) and for the growth of the Christian state, Charles Freeman's *AD 381* (Pimlico, London 2008).

## Chapter 8: Byzantium and the Arab Siege

1. Procopius, *History of the Wars* (Leob Classical Library, Volume 81, Harvard University Press, 2006, translated by H. B. Dewing) Book III, p. 127. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

2. Ibid., p. 129.

3. Ibid., Book V, p. 47.

4. Theophanes, *Chronicles* (University of Pennsylvania Press, edited by Harry Turtledove) p. 51, www.upenn.edu. Several writers have commented on the soap dish as an unlikely murder weapon, for example Alfonso Lowe in *The Barrier and the Bridge* (WW Norton & Company Inc, New York, 1972): 'Has anyone seen a Byzantine soap dish? Did the Byzantines use soap?' (p. 74); 'The cynic may expect the discovery of the soap dish, with which he was not slain, at any moment' (p. 150).

5. Theodosius, *Epistola Theodosii monachi ad Leonem Archidiaconum de expugnatione Syracuaarum.* This letter, written in gaol in Palermo some time between 878 and 885, is quoted in full in Domenico Gaspare Lancia di Brolo's *Storia della Chiesa in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1880) p. 250, author's translation.

6. Ibid., p. 249.

7. Ibid., p. 251.

8. The best historical account of the siege appears in Michele Amari's *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (Romeo Prampolini Editore, Catania, 1933). It concludes, Vol I, Chapter IX, p. 547: '*Questo fu il fine di Siracusa antica: rimise un laberinto di rovine, senz'anima vivente.'* This was the end of ancient Syracuse: reduced to a labyrinth of ruins, without a living soul.

## Chapter 9: Outline to 1945

1. Ibn Edrisi, *Libro del Re Ruggero* (Versione da M. Amari e C. Schiaparelli, Roma, 1883) p. 33, author's translation.

2. Serafino Privitera, *Storia di Siracusa* (Napoli, 1878) p.155 and Teresa Carpinteri, *Siracusa – Città Fortificata* (Flaccovio Editore, Palermo, 1983) p. 31. On the probable site of the Dionysius castle on the isthmus was built the palace of Hiero II, which became the seat of the Roman governors. The Arabs later built the Marieth Castle there. The Spanish fortifications were thus built on ancient foundations.

3. Giovan Petro Bellori, *Le Vite de Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti Moderni* (Rome, 1672) ed. Evelina Borea, Turin, 1976. Quoted in Patrick Hunt, *Caravaggio* (Haus Publishing, London, 2004). An entertaining, fictional account of Caravaggio's stay in Malta and Sicily has been written by Andrea Camilleri (*Il Colore del Sole*, Mondadori, Milano, 2007).

4. Vincenzo Mirabella, *Dichiarazioni della Pianta dell'Antiche Siracuse* (Napoli, 1613) Vol. I, Tavola 5, p. 99, author's paraphrase and translation.

5. Anonymous British report from 1693, entitled 'An account of the late dreadful earthquake in the Island of Sicily'. Quoted in Liliane Dufour and Henri Raymond's *Siracusa tra due secoli* (Arnaldo Lombardi Editore, Palermo 1998) p. 28, an analysis of the changes to Syracuse from the 1693 earthquake.

6. Ibid., p. 113.

7. Nelson's letter quoted by Douglas Sladen, *In Sicily* (Sands & Co, London, 1901) Vol. I, p. 303.

8. On the British Protectorate in Sicily see Desmond Gregory, *Sicily: The Insecure Base* (Associated University Press, London, 1988).

9. Mariarosa Malesani, *I Pescatori: Orgoglio d'Appartenenza e Memoria delle Tradizioni* (Pesca e Pescatori nel Siracusano, Giotto–Siracusa, 2007) p. 75.

10. Christopher Hibbert, *Garibaldi and His Enemies* (Longmans, London, 1965) p. 213.

11. Corrado Piccione, *Siracusa di Ieri e di Oggi* (Emanuele Romeo Editore, Siracusa 2006) p. 65.

12. For an account of the Sicilian campaign see Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory* (Collins, London, 1988) and for Operation Ladbroke, the action

at Ponte Grande, Tullio Marcon, *Assalto a Tre Ponti* (Ermanno Albertelli Editore, Parma, 2002).

13. George Chatterton, *Wings of Pegasus* (US edition, The Battery Press, Nashville, 1982) p. 81.

14. Ibid., p. 82.

15. Ibid., p. 85.

## Chapter 10: Modern Syracuse

1. Denis Mack Smith, *A History of Sicily: Modern Sicily after 1713* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1968) p. 536.

2. Mariarosa Malesani, *I Pescatori: Orgoglio d'Appartenenza e Memoria delle Tradizioni* (Pesca e Pescatori nel Siracusano, Giotto-Siracusa 2007) p. 73.

3. Mons. Giuseppe Bruno, *A Concise History of the Weeping of the Madonna in Syracuse* (Marchese, Syracuse, 1999) p. 11. Reprinted with the permission of the Santuario Madonna delle Lacrime, Siracusa.

4. Francesco Renda, *Sicilia e Mediterraneo, la Nuova Geopolitica* (Sellerio editore, Palermo, 2000) p. 12, author's translation. Reprinted with the permission of Sellerio Editore.

5. Vincenzo Consolo, *L'Olivo e l'Olivastro* (Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano, 1994) p. 83.

## Chapter 11: The Greek Era

1. Douglas Sladen, *In Sicily* (Sands & Co, London, 1901) preface to Vol. I, pp. ix, xi.

2. Kenneth Jenkins, *Coins of Greek Sicily* (British Museum Publications Limited, 1966) p. 7. For more information see Barclay Head's classic *Coinage of Syracuse* (1874) and the website: *Ancient Coins of Sicily:* www.snible.org/coins/hn/sicily.html

3. Cicero, *The Verrine Orations II* (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1935, translated by LHG Greenwood), Vol. XXVII, p. 543. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and trustees of the Loeb Classical Library®, a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

4. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (Published by Aris & Phillips, Warminster1990, translated by A. E. Douglas) Vol. V, p. 115. The Agrigentine Gate stood in the area of the necropolis, on the Epipoli, known as Fusco. No trace of Archimedes' tomb has remained.

5. Margaret Guido, *Syracuse: A Handbook to Its History and Principal Monuments* (Max Parrish & Co Ltd, London 1958) p. 66.

6. Bonna Westcoat, *Syracuse: The Fairest Greek City* (Emory University Museum of Art and Archaeology, Atlanta, USA, 1990) pp. 99–101. This publication, the catalogue of an exhibition held at Syracuse's archaeological museum together with the Emory University in 1990, contains some informative articles on Greek Syracuse together with illustrations and details of the exhibits.

7. R. J. A. Wilson, *Sicily under the Roman Empire* (Aris & Phillips Ltd, Oxford 1990) p. 343. A definitive account of the archaeology and history of Roman Sicily, with much interesting detail on Syracuse.

8. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Penguin Classics, 1972 edition, translated by Rex Warner) Book 6, p. 472. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

9. Luigi Mauceri, *Il Castello Eurialo nella Storia e nell'Arte* (Edizioni Dafni, Catania 1928) p. 10.

## Chapter 12: The Roman Era

1. R. J. A. Wilson, *Sicily under the Roman Empire* (Aris & Phillips Ltd, Oxford 1990) p. 110. Reprinted with the permission of Professor Wilson, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

2. Tacitus, *Annals XIII* (The Internet Classics Archive, translated by A. Church and W. Brodribb).

3. Guy de Maupassant, *La Vie Errante* (Paul Ollendorff, Editeur, Paris, 1890) pp. 117, 121, author's translation.

4. R. J. A. Wilson, *Sicily under the Roman Empire* (Aris & Phillips, Oxford, 1990) p. 342. Reprinted with the permission of Professor Wilson.

## Chapter 13: The Early Christian Era

1. Edward Hutton, *Cities of Sicily* (Methuen & Co Ltd, London, 1926) p. 80.

2. Agostino Amore, *San Marciano di Siracusa* (Tipografica Poliglotta Vaticana, 1958) p. 18.

3. Margaret Guido, *Syracuse: A Handbook to Its History and Principal Monuments* (Max Parrish and Co Ltd, London, 1958) p. 80.

4. Mariarita Sgarlata, *S. Giovanni a Siracusa* (Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra, Città del Vaticano, 2003) pp. 97, 108.

5. Ibid., p. 113.

6. Ibid., p. 119.

## Chapter 14: Baroque Syracuse

1. Anthony Blunt, *Sicilian Baroque* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1968) p. 9.

2. Ibid., p. 24.

3. The story of the Vermexio family and their buildings is covered in Giuseppe Agnello's *I Vermexio* (La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1959).

4. Peter Robb, *M* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, 1998) p. 444; a biography of Caravaggio. Reprinted with permission of Peter Robb and Bloomsbury Publishing.

## Chapter 15: Other Important Monuments

1. Laura Cassataro, *Guida del Castello Maniace* (Erre Produzioni, Siracusa, 2004).

2. Teresa Carpinteri, *Siracusa–Città Fortificata* (Flaccovio Editore, Palermo, 1983).

# Further Reading

Much has been written about Syracuse but mostly in the wider context of Sicily, with very little specifically on Syracuse. For readers wanting to know more, or to have something to take with them on a visit to Sicily, here are some suggestions.

The ancient writers are hard to beat and fortunately their works are available in highly readable translations, the following in paperback editions.

For the early Greek colonisation of Sicily, the Athenian Expedition and the Athenian siege of Syracuse: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Penguin Classics) Books 6 and 7.

For the lives of some of the protagonists: Plutarch, *The Rise and Fall of Athens*, on the Athenian Generals Nicias and Alcibiades, and *The Age of Alexander*, on the tyrants Dion, Timoleon and Pyrrhus (Penguin Classics).

For the Roman siege of Syracuse: Livy, *Hannibal's War* (Oxford World's Classics) Books 24 and 25.

For narrative accounts of the tyrants from Dionysius I to Agathocles, and for full details on Syracuse: Edward Freeman, *History of Sicily* (1894, reprinted by Elibron Classics,) Volume IV.

For the archaeological background, essays on Greek Syracuse and a commentary on exhibits in the archaeological museum: Donna Westcoat, ed., *Syracuse, the Fairest Greek City* (1990), the catalogue of an exhibition put on by the Emory University Museum, Atlanta, USA, at the archaeological museum in Syracuse (De Luca Edizioni d'Arte).

For the story of Archimedes' manuscript, discovered in 1998: Reviel Netz & William Noel, *The Archimedes Codex* (Phoenix, 2007).

Two travel books, featuring tours of Sicily, have interesting chapters on Syracuse: Vincent Cronin, *The Golden Honeycomb* (Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1954). Alfonso Lowe, *The Barrier and the Bridge* (WW Norton & Co, New York, 1972).

For the lives of two notable visitors to Syracuse: Robert Graves, *Count Belisarius* (Penguin Classics, 1954), Justinian's general, a fictional account. Patrick Hunt, *Caravaggio* (Haus Publishing, London, 2004), a biography.

Mary Renault, *The Mask of Apollo* (Arrow Books, London, 2004), a historical novel about an actor, is set mostly in Syracuse at the time of

Dion.

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# Chronological Table

## SYRACUSE

For 1,600 years, from foundation by the Greeks to capture by the Arabs, Syracuse was the leading city in Sicily and for a time one of the most powerful in the world. Her peak was under Hiero II in the Greek era, with a likely population of over 300,000, and 27 kilometres of walls surrounding the city.

### BC

### PREHISTORIC

Ortygia inhabited from ninth or tenth century

c1, 200 arrival of Sicels from Italy

Pantalica, tombs discovered from thirteenth to seventh centuries BC

### GREEK: Archaic Period

Greek and Phoenician colonisation of Sicily

| | |
|---|---|
| 733 | Syracuse founded by Archias from Corinth |
| 664–599 | Syracusan outposts established at Akrai, Kasmenai and Kamarina |

734–580 Greek settlements founded initially in eastern Sicily:

Naxos, Zancle, Leontini, Megara Hyblaea Catana

Second wave followed:

Gela, Himera, Selinus, Akragas

Phoenician settlements founded in the west: Motya, Panormus and Soluntum

### GREEK: Classical Period

485–78 Gelon in Syracuse

478–67 Hiero I

467–6 Thrasybulus
466–05 Democracy
415–13 Athenian siege of Syracuse
413 Athenians defeated
405–367 Dionysius I
388 Plato in Syracuse
367–44 Dionysius II
367 Plato in Syracuse
354 Dion assassinated
344–37 Timoleon
491–485 Gelon in Gela
480 Carthaginians defeated at Himera
474 Etruscans defeated at Cumae
460–40 Ducetius leads Sicel Wars
431 Peloponnesian War begins Athens versus Sparta
410–05 Carthaginian invasion
409 Selinus and Himera destroyed
404 Athens surrenders to Sparta
397 Fall of Motya
346/5 Carthaginian invasion
340 Carthaginians defeated at Crimisus River

## GREEK: Hellenistic Period

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 317– | 289 | Agathocles |
| 310– | 06 | Agathocles invades North Africa |
| 288– | 79 | Hicetas |
| 278– | 76 | Pyrrhus |
| 269– | 16 | Hiero II Golden age of Syracuse and alliance with Rome against Carthage. Archimedes working in Syracuse |
| 216– | 15 | Hieronymus |
| 214– | 12 | Roman siege of Syracuse |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 336–311 | 23 | Alexander the Great Carthaginian invasion |
| 264–218– | 41 01 | First Punic War Rome versus Carthage Second Punic War |

## ROMAN

| | |
|---|---|
| 212 | Romans capture Syracuse Archimedes killed |
| 75 and 71 | Cicero in Sicily |
| 73–71 | Verres, governor of Sicily, in Syracuse |
| 21 | Syracuse granted status of Roman *colonia* |
| Sicily becomes the first province of Rome | |
| 202 | Hannibal defeated at Battle of Zama |
| 146 | Carthage and Corinth destroyed |
| 139 | First slave revolt in Sicily |
| 104 | Second slave revolt |
| 44 | Caesar's assassination |
| 44–36 | Sextus Pompey in Sicily |
| 31 | Battle of Actium |
| 27 | BC–14 AD Augustus Emperor |

## AD

c60 St Paul in Syracuse

Martyrs of mid-third century

S. Marciano, bishop of Syracuse

| | |
|---|---|
| 278 | Syracuse sacked by the Franks |
| 304 | Santa Lucia martyred in Syracuse |
| Sant'Agata in Catania | |
| 303–04 | Persecutions of Emperor Diocletian |
| 306–37 | Constantine I Emperor |
| 313 | Edict of Toleration frees Christianity |
| 476 | Romulus Augustulus abdicates in |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Rome as emperor |

## BYZANTINE

| | |
|---|---|
| 535 | Belisarius takes Sicily for Byzantium |
| c640 | Bishop Zosimo transfers cathedral to Ortygia |
| 663–68 | Emperor Constans II in Syracuse |
| 527–65 | Justinian I Emperor |
| 641–68 | Constans II Emperor |

## ARAB

| | |
|---|---|
| 878 | Arabs capture Syracuse |
| 831 | Palermo falls to the Arabs |

## OUTLINE TO MODERN TIMES

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The importance of Syracuse declined after Palermo became the capital of Sicily under the Arabs and the Normans. As Sicily became subjected to a series of foreign occupations, Syracuse was mostly contained within Ortygia, with a population of under 20,000, until after the Unification of Italy in 1861.

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## AD

| | |
|---|---|
| 1039 | George Maniaces, who had retaken Syracuse briefly for Byzantium, leaves Sicily |
| 1071 | Normans take Palermo |
| 1492 | Jews expelled from Syracuse |
| 1529 | Knights of St John in Syracuse |
| 1535 | Spanish fortify Syracuse |
| 1608 | Caravaggio in Syracuse |
| 1693 | Syracuse hit by earthquake rebuilt in Baroque style |
| 1798 | Nelson in Syracuse |
| 1837 | Cholera outbreak in Syracuse revolt against Bourbons |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1848 | Revolt against Bourbons |
| 1860 | Syracuse liberated from Bourbon rule |
| 1880s | Syracuse expands and develops as a modern city |
| 1943 | Battle for Syracuse |
| 1198–1250 | Frederick II Emperor |
| 1282 | Sicilian Vespers Spanish rule Sicily |
| 1453 | Constantinople falls to the Turks |
| 1565 | Siege of Malta by the Turks |
| 1571 | Turks defeated at Battle of Lepanto |
| 1693 | Other cities destroyed and rebuilt, especially Noto, Ragusa, Modica and Catania |
| 1806–15 | British Protectorate in Sicily |
| 1860 | Garibaldi takes Sicily from Bourbons |
| 1861–71 | Unification of Italy |
| 1943 | Allies launch Operation Husky in World War II and take Sicily |
| 1947 | Sicilian Regional Government established |

# Glossary

## 1. THE MAIN CHARACTERS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Deinomenes | Greek | Father of Gelon, Hiero, Polyzalos and Thrasybulus, who between them ruled Syracuse from 485 to 466 BC, forming the Deinomenid Dynasty |
| Demarete | Greek | Daughter of Theron, tyrant of Akragas, and wife of Gelon |
| Demeter | Greek | Goddess of the harvest, earth and fertility (Roman Ceres) |
| Demosthenes | Greek | Athenian general |
| Diocles | Greek | Syracusan general and politician |
| Diocletian | Roman | Roman Emperor |
| Dion | Greek | Briefly tyrant of Syracuse, married to Arete, daughter of Dionysius I |
| Dionysus | Greek | God representing |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | the life force, religious ecstasy and wine (Roman Bacchus) |
| Dionysius I | Greek | Tyrant of Syracuse |
| Dionysius II | Greek | Tyrant of Syracuse, son of above by Doris |
| Doris | Greek | Wife of Dionysius I |
| Ducetius | Greek | Sicel leader, defeated by Syracuse |
| Epicarmus | Greek | Syracusan writer of comic plays |
| Eunus | Roman | Syrian slave who led revolt against the Romans |
| Eurymedon | Greek | Athenian general |
| Eutichia | Christian | Mother of Santa Lucia |
| Garibaldi, Giuseppe | Modern | Italian patriot and military leader, active in the *Risorgimento* to expel foreign powers and unite Italy |
| Gelimer | Byzantine | Vandal king of North Africa |
| Gelon | Greek | First great tyrant of Syracuse |
| Gelon | Greek | Son of Hiero II |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gisco | Greek | Carthaginian general |
| Gregory, Pope | Christian | Pope Gregory the Great |
| Gylippus | Greek | Spartan general who commanded the Syracusan forces during the Athenian siege |
| Hades | Greek | God of the underworld (Roman Pluto) |
| Hamilcar | Greek | Carthaginian general, defeated at battle of Himera |
| Hannibal | Greek | Carthaginian general, grandson of Hamilcar |
| Hannibal | Greek | Carthaginian general, famous enemy of Rome |
| Hera | Greek | Goddess associated with women and marriage; wife of Zeus (Roman Juno) |
| Hermes | Greek | God of the market, messenger of Zeus (Roman Mercury) |
| Hermocrates | Greek | Syracusan general and politician |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hermocritus | Greek | Father of Dionysius I |
| Hermocritus | Greek | Son of Dionysius I by Doris |
| Hicetas | Greek | Tyrant of Leontini, defeated by Timoleon |
| Hicetas | Greek | Syracusan general, tyrant of Syracuse after Agathocles |
| Hiero I | Greek | Tyrant of Syracuse, brother of Gelon |
| Hiero II | Greek | Ruler of Syracuse, ally of Rome |
| Hieronymus | Greek | Grandson of Hiero II, briefly tyrant of Syracuse |
| Himilco | Greek | Carthaginian general |
| Hipparinus | Greek | Son of Dionysius I by Aristomache |
| Hippocrates | Greek | Tyrant of Gela |
| Hortensius | Roman | Roman advocate, counsel for Verres |
| Iannuso, Antonina | Modern | Original witness of the tears of the Madonna |
| Justinian I | Byzantine | Emperor who recaptured |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | the Western Empire |
| Laevinus | Roman | Roman consul, responsible for Syracuse |
| Lamachus | Greek | Athenian general |
| Leptines | Greek | Brother of Dionysius I |
| Leptines | Greek | Father of Philistis, wife of Hiero II |
| Lucia, Santa | Christian | Patron saint of Syracuse |
| Mago | Greek | Carthaginian general |
| Mamertines | Greek | Mercenaries based in Messana |
| Maniaces, George | Byzantine | Byzantine Greek general |
| Marabitti, Ignazio | Baroque | Sculptor |
| Marcellus | Roman | Roman general, conqueror of Syracuse |
| Marciano, San | Christian | Bishop of Syracuse |
| Martin, Pope | Christian | Pope who challenged the authority of Emperor Constans II |
| Minniti, Mario | Baroque | Artist and friend of Caravaggio |
| Mirabella, Vincenzo | Baroque | Syracusan scholar and archaeologist |
| Moericus | Greek | Spanish mercenary who betrayed |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Ortygia to the Romans |
| Nereis | Greek | Wife of Gelon, son of Hiero II |
| Nicias | Greek | Athenian general and politician |
| Nike | Greek | Goddess of triumph and victory (Roman Victoria) |
| Octavian | Roman | Roman politician who became Emperor Augustus |
| Orsi, Paolo | Modern | Archaeologist, Director of Antiquities |
| Palma, Andrea | Baroque | Architect |
| Paschasius | Christian | Roman governor of Syracuse who interrogated Lucia and had her put to death |
| Paul, Saint | Christian | Apostle and leader of the early Christian Church |
| Persephone | Greek | Goddess of spring, also called Kore; daughter of Demeter and wife of Hades (Roman Proserpina) |
| Peter, Saint | Christian | Apostle and |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | leader of the early Christian Church |
| Philistis | Greek | Wife of Hiero II |
| Philistus | Greek | Wealthy Syracusan; supporter of Dionysius I; general and historian |
| Philodemus | Greek | Captain of the garrison at the Euryalus Castle during the Roman siege |
| Pindar | Greek | Lyric poet |
| Plato | Greek | Athenian philosopher |
| Polyzalos | Greek | Brother of Gelon, Hiero I and Thrasybulus |
| Procopius | Byzantine | Secretary to Belisarius and historian |
| Ptolemy | Greek | One of Alexander the Great's generals |
| Pyrrhus | Greek | Military commander, king of Epirus and briefly ruler of Sicily |
| Sappho | Greek | Poet |
| Scipio, Publius Cornelius (Africanus Major) | Roman | Roman general, conqueror of Hannibal |
| Scipio, Publius | Roman | Adopted |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cornelius (Aemilianus Africanus) | | grandson of the above, destroyer of Carthage |
| Sextus Pompey | Roman | Pompey's son, who established himself in Sicily during the Civil Wars |
| Sicanus | Greek | Syracusan general |
| Sosis | Greek | Traitor who helped the Romans take Syracuse |
| Sostratus | Greek | Syracusan leader in time of Pyrrhus |
| Telephus | Greek | Corinthian, member of the founding group of Syracuse |
| Thearides | Greek | Brother of Dionysius I |
| Theocritus | Greek | Syracusan poet |
| Theodora | Byzantine | Wife of Emperor Justinian I |
| Theodosius | Byzantine | Godson to Belisarius and Antonina |
| Theodosius | Byzantine | Monk present at Arab siege of Syracuse |
| Theron | Greek | Tyrant of Akragas, ally of Gelon and father of Demarete |
| Thoenon | Greek | Syracusan leader in time |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | of Pyrrhus |
| Thrasybulus | Greek | Tyrant of Syracuse; brother of Gelon, Hiero I and Polyzelus |
| Timoleon | Greek | Ruler of Syracuse |
| Timophanes | Greek | Timoleon's brother |
| Tyche | Greek | Goddess of luck (Roman Fortuna) |
| Vermexio, | Baroque | Syracusan architect |
| Andrea | Baroque | Syracusan architect, son of above |
| Vermexio, Verres | Roman | Corrupt Roman governor of Sicily, prosecuted by Cicero |
| Vittorini, Elio | Modern | Syracusan writer |
| Wignacourt, Alof de | Baroque | Grand Master of the Knights of St John |
| Zeus | Greek | Ruler of the Olympian gods, the Liberator (Roman Jupiter or Jove, Italian Giove) |
| Zosimo | Christian | Bishop of Syracuse |

## 2. GENERAL

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gamori | Greek | Aristocratic |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | party in ancient Syracuse |
| Giudecca | Greek | Jewish quarter in Syracuse |
| Hellas | Greek | Greece |
| Hellene | Greek | A Greek |
| Hellenistic | Greek | The period between Alexander the Great (d 323 BC) and the battle of Actium (31 BC) |
| Hermae | Greek | Statues of Hermes, symbols of good luck |
| Hexaplon Gate | Greek | Six entrances (going towards Catania) |
| Hoplite | Greek | Foot soldier who carried a large shield |
| Hyblaean Mountains | Greek | Range of flat top mountains behind Syracuse, after *Hybla*, a Sicel goddess |
| Ionian | Greek | Ancient Greek ethnic group from Athens and the Aegean islands |
| Ipogeo | Greek | Cave |
| Kale Akte | Greek | City founded by Ducetius, literally *Fair* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | *Headland* |
| Kouros | Greek | Young man |
| Lacrime | Greek | Tears |
| Lakkios | Greek | Name for Little Harbour, literally *basin* (Roman Laccium) |
| Latifundia | Latin | Large estates created originally by the Romans in Sicily to maximise grain production |
| Latomia | Italian | Quarry |
| Ligne | Spanish | Spanish Viceroy whose name was given to a gate leading into Ortygia |
| Lucertola | Italian | Lizard, the nickname of the architect Giovanni Vermexio |
| Mangonel | Latin | Catapult |
| Maniple | Latin | Small military unit |
| Mantelet | Latin | Protective screen or shield |
| Mille | Italian | Thousand, as in Garibaldi's *Mille* |
| Moenia | Latin | Walls, as in *ex moenia*, outside the walls |
| Nassos | Greek | Island (ancient |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | dialect name for Ortygia) |
| Neapolis | Greek | Mainland district of Syracuse |
| Ortygia | Greek | Historic centre of Syracuse, originally an island |
| Ortyx | Greek | Quail, origin of the name Ortygia |
| Palazzo | Greek | Palace |
| Palimpsest | Greek | Manuscript on which the original writing has been effaced for reuse |
| Pantalica | Greek | Prehistoric site north of Syracuse, a necropolis and World Heritage Site |
| Pantocrator | Greek | All powerful, as in *Christ Pantocrator* |
| Papiro | Greek | Papyrus |
| Parrucca | Greek | Wig |
| Pegasus | Greek | Mythical horse, used on coins, which stood for freedom and democracy |
| Peloponnese | Greek | Mainland of southern Greece, literally *Isle of Pelops*, an |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | ancient hero |
| Pentaplon Gate | Greek | Five entrances (into Ortygia) |
| Pentapolis | Greek | Another name for ancient Greek Syracuse literally *five cities* |
| Phalanx | Greek | Close formation of foot soldiers |
| Piazza | Greek | Public square or open space |
| Piazzaforte | Greek | Fortress |
| Plemmirio | Greek | Point on Great Harbour opposite Ortygia |
| Plethron | Greek | Ancient measurement equal to approx. 30 metres |
| Polis | Greek | City state |
| Ponte | Greek | Bridge |
| Porta | Greek | Gate |
| Porta Marina | Greek | Spanish gate into Ortygia from the harbour front |
| Porta Urbica | Italian | Ancient Greek site in Ortygia |
| Quaestor | Latin | Roman official responsible for tax collection |
| Quadriga | Greek | Four-horse racing chariot |
| Quadrireme | Greek | Ancient |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | warship with four banks of oars |
| Quinquereme | Greek | Ancient warship with five banks of oars |
| Ribellino | Latin | Small port, part of Little Harbour |
| Ronco | Latin | Small communal square |
| Rotonda | Latin | Round open space (as in catacombs) |
| Sambuca | Latin | Enormous siege engine |
| San/Santo/ Santa | Italian | Saint |
| Seppellimento | Italian | Burial |
| Scorpion | Latin | Inhabitants of central Sicily before arrival of the Greeks |
| Sicans | Greek | Engine firing missiles |
| Sicels | Greek | Inhabitants of eastern Sicily before arrival of the Greeks |
| Siracusa | Italian | Syracuse |
| Stade | Greek | Ancient measurement of approx. 200 metres, or the length of the stadium in Athens |
| Stoa | Greek | Public building with colonnades |
| Strategos | Greek | General with |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Autokrator | | Supreme Power |
| Syraco | Greek | Marsh outside Syracuse, origin of the city's name |
| Syrakosia | Greek | Largest merchant ship in antiquity, built under Archimedes' supervision |
| Syrakousai | Greek | Ancient Greek name for Syracuse |
| Syrakosion | Greek | Of the Syracusans (appears on coins) |
| Temenos | Greek | Sacred precinct by a temple |
| Tetradrachm | Greek | Four drachma coin |
| Tonnara | Greek | Building for processing tuna fish |
| Trinacria | Greek | Ancient name for Sicily |
| Trireme | Greek | Ancient warship with three banks of oars and a crew of 200 |
| Triskeles | Greek | Three-legged symbol of Sicily |
| Tufo | Italian | Soft stone, common in Syracuse |
| Tyche | Greek | Mainland district of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Tyrant | Greek | Syracuse Ruler who seized power by illegal means |
| Via lata perpetua | Greek | The long road in Neapolis described by Cicero |

1. Duomo (Cathedral).

2. Duomo, interior showing Greek columns.

3. Piazza Duomo.

4. Ortygia and the Great Harbour.

5. Old Post Office and inland waterway.

6. Caravaggio's *Seppellimento di Santa Lucia* (Burial of Santa Lucia), 1608.

7. Basilica of Santa Lucia.

8. Greek theatre.

9. Fountain of Arethusa.

10. Silver statue of Santa Lucia, which is paraded through the streets of Syracuse during her festivals in May and December.

11. Sepulchre of Santa Lucia.

12. Maniace Castle, showing entrance to the Great Harbour.

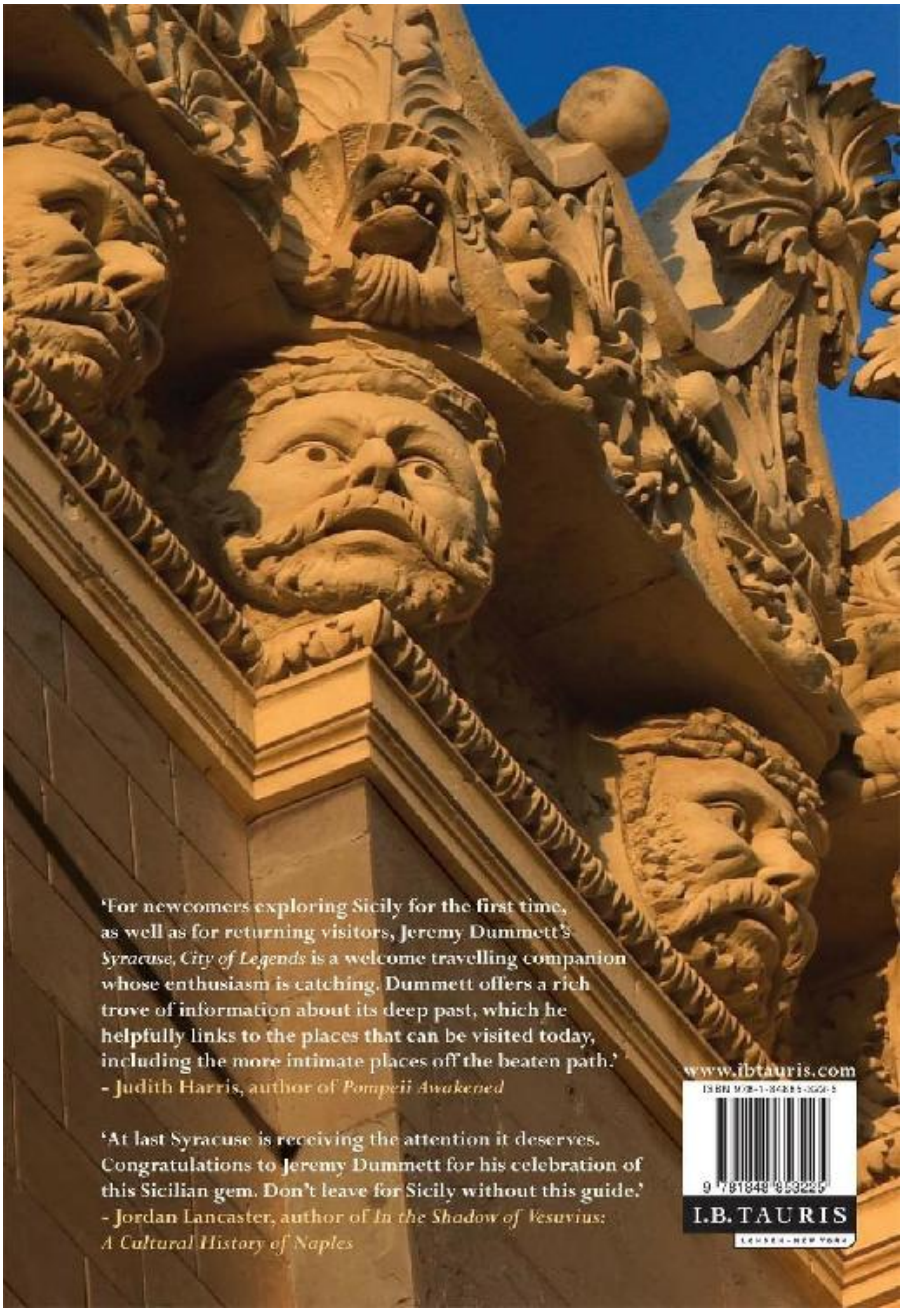
13. Church of Santa Lucia alla Badia.

14. Archimedes' burning mirror.

15. Archimedes' iron arm. Sixteenth century frescoes from the Uffizi in Florence, showing the devices Archimedes used to defend Syracuse from the Romans.

16. Ortygia’s outdoor market.

17. Temple of Apollo.



'For newcomers exploring Sicily for the first time, as well as for returning visitors, Jeremy Dummett's *Syracuse, City of Legends* is a welcome travelling companion whose enthusiasm is catching. Dummett offers a rich trove of information about its deep past, which he helpfully links to the places that can be visited today, including the more intimate places off the beaten path.'
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